STRUCTURAL ELEMENTS OF THE SOCIETY'S FUNDAMENTAL INSTITUTIONS

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Abstract: Due to the functionalist perspective, social structure is the carcass of a social whole (society or its part) the elements of which are invariable in time, interdependent of each other and largely determine the functioning of the whole in general and its members in particular. The focus is made on both interdependence - it's like a house: take some brick off the wall and the whole building may ruin, and function - take a log: it can be burnt to get warm or used as construction material to build a house. In other words, structural functionalism analyzes parts of the society in terms of their purpose within the whole.

Key words: Formal group, Function, social community, social relations, social institutions, personal status, structure of society.

It's clear that social structures of ancient and modern societies differ from each other. This difference is caused by diachronic changes taking place in the society: although the structure presents a stable carcass, it is stable or invariable only for a definite period of time, and historically it changes. Social structure is qualitative certainty of the society which means that change in structure leads to radical, qualitative change in the society. Structure ensures stability required for the functioning of associated social elements which accumulate quantitative changes up till the moment when they turn to quality, and a need for structural changes in the social object rises. For instance, development of the bourgeoisie and proletariat as classes and formation of new relations of production lead to a bourgeoisie revolution and change of the socio-economic system.

Social structure is characterized by the following main attributes:
- ➢ hierarchy - vertical and horizontal arrangement of structural elements which is based on their unequal access to authority, income, social prestige etc.;
- ➢ interconnection of structural elements which is realized through exchange of resources, information, sharing values etc.;
- ➢ differentiation into the smallest elements and their integration into the whole;
- ➢ flexibility, capacity to change so it is an important part of the management.

Traditionally, theorists identify the following types of social structure: socio-demographic, socio-class, socio-ethnic, socio-professional, socio-confessional etc. No doubt, any social object has its structure. For instance, at analyzing a labour collective we may consider employees within the socio-professional structure: those who got secondary, vocational and higher education, scientific qualifications, representatives of various professions, specializations, their levels of qualification.

The economic system is a set of economic institutions and relations that people enter into in the process of realizing the relations of ownership, production, distribution, exchange and consumption of the aggregate social product.

The political system consists of integral self-regulating elements (organizations) of the state, political parties, socio-political movements, associations and relations between them. An individual acts politically as a citizen, deputy, member of a party, organization.[1]

In social structures of the second type their elements are viewed as relatively independent subsystems or spheres of social life (politics, economy etc). Their number is a point for debate. For instance, G. Hegel and F. Engels spoke of politics, economy and family; modern theorists perceive four spheres: culture, politics, legislation and economy although they don't deny that other spheres can also be seen in religion, science or in family.

Economic sphere includes four types of activities - production, distribution, exchange and consumption. It provides means for increasing the material welfare of the society: enterprises, banks, markets, money flows and the like that enables the society to use available resources (land, labour, capital and management) in order to produce the amount of goods and services sufficient enough to satisfy people's essential needs in food, shelter and leisure. About 50% of the economically active population take part in the economic sphere as the young, old, disabled do not produce material wealth. But indirectly 100% of the population participate in the economic sphere as consumers of created goods and services.

Political sphere includes the head of the state and the state bodies such as government and parliament, local bodies of power, the army, the police, taxation and customs bodies which together constitute the state and political parties which are not part of the state. Its objective is to realize the goals of the society: to ensure the social order, settle conflicts arisen between partners (employers, employees and trade unions), defend the state frontiers and sovereignty, impose new laws, collect taxes etc. But its main objective is to legalize ways of struggle for power and defend the power obtained by a particular class or group. The objective of political parties is to legally defend the diversified political interests of different, very often opposite, groups of the population.

Spiritual sphere includes culture, science, religion and education and their artifacts such as monuments and establishments of culture, pieces of arts, research and learning institutions, temples and cathedrals, mass media etc. If science is aimed at discovering new knowledge in various spheres, education should translate this knowledge to the future generations in a most effective way, for schools and universities are built, new programs and teaching methods are worked out, qualified teachers are trained. Culture is designed to create values of arts, exhibit them in museums, galleries, libraries etc. Culture also comprises religion which is considered the pivot of spiritual culture in any society as it gives sense to human life and determines basic moral norms.

Social sphere embraces classes, social layers, nations associated by their relations and interactions. The given sphere of the society is understood as narrow and wide. In its wide meaning the social sphere is a totality of organizations and establishments that are in charge of the population's wealth; they are shops, transport means, communal and consumer services, establishments of catering, medicine, communication, leisure and recreation. Thus, as such the social sphere covers almost all classes and layers - the rich, the poor and the middle class.

In its narrow meaning the social sphere is designed for the members of the society who are regarded as socially unprotected (pensioners, unemployed, with low incomes or with many children etc) and the establishments that provide their service, namely, the bodies of social security (including social insurance) of both local and national subordination. In this case, the social sphere is designed for the poorer layers of the population.

There are other approaches as to the number of parts or spheres of the society but they are all united by a view that social subsystems cannot exist as isolated. They are arranged in a pattern of relationships that, together, make the system. The social naturally penetrates into the productive and managerial spheres since people of different nationalities, ages, sexes and confessions can work together at an enterprise, on the one hand. On the other hand, if the country's economy doesn't perform its main objective to satisfy the population with the sufficient amount of goods and services, the number of jobs doesn't increase, there may arise negative consequences in the society. For instance, the money is short to pay wages and pensions, unemployment appears, the living standards of the socially unprotected layers are decreasing, crimes are increasing etc. In other words, success or recession in one sphere has a great influence on prosperity in the other one.

The third type of social structure is best developed by structural functionalists who assert that structure arises out of face-to-face interactions of people. Interactions make up patterns which are independent of the particular individual, because patterns are determined by social norms and values of the given society. For instance, somebody needs money. He can earn it, but if in some society robbery or burglary is not disapproved of, he may rob someone to reach the purpose. So patterns exert a force which shapes behaviour and identity. That's why T. Parsons and his supporters define social structure as the way in which the society is organized into predictable relationships, or invariable patterns of social interaction called institutions.

Social structure does not concern itself with the people forming the society or their social organizations, neither does it study who are the people or organizations forming it, or what is the ultimate goal of their relations. Social structure deals rather with the very structure of their relations - how they are organized in a pattern of relationships, or institution. So due to structural functionlism, structural elements of the society are social institutions and social groupings; structural units are social norms and values.

Social groupings are social groups, social classes and layers, communities, social organizations, social statuses and roles.

A group is a number of people or things which we class together, so that they form a whole. In our minds we could group any assortment of people together. A social group, however, means more than just an assortment of people. There must be something to hold them together as a whole.

To be a social group, people must:
➢ interact with one another,
➢ perceive themselves as a group.

Social group is an assortment of people associated by a socially significant distinction, people who interact together in an orderly way and perceive themselves or perceived by others as a group.

Any social group is characterized by a number of attributes:

- interaction within a group is realized on the basis of shared norms, values and expectations about one another's behaviour;
- groups develop their own internal structure: kernel and periphery, norms, value, statuses and roles; they can be rigid and formal or loose and flexible;
- there is a sense of belonging, individuals identify with the group; outsiders are distinguished from members and treated differently;
- groups are formed for a purpose - specific or diffuse;
- people in a group tend to be similar, and the more they participate, the more similar they become.

There are a lot of classifications of social groups. The first one embraces statistical and real groups. A statistical group is an assortment of people differentiated by a definite characteristic that can be measured. For instance, citizens are people living in formal settlements called cities. A real group possesses a number of characteristics describing its immanent essence. So, citizens are people living in cities, who live an urban way of life with highly diversified labour (mainly industrial and information kinds) and leisure activities, with high professional and social mobility, high frequency of human contacts in formal communication etc. According to this definition, only a part of the statistical group of citizens comply with the criterion of being urbanites, or not everyone who lives in city can belong to the real group of citizens.

Social groups can also be classified according to their size, character of organization, emotional depth, accomplished objective etc.

According to size, groups can be small, middle-sized and large ones. Small social groups, normally small in number, are characterized by human interactions in the form of direct contacts like in families. The smallest groups are stable and more constraining, but offer more intimacy and individuality. As size increases, freedom increases, but intimacy declines and the emerging group structure tends to limit individuality. Contacts are frequent and intensive; members take each other into account as they group together on the basis of shared norms, values and expectations about one another's behaviour.

Middle-sized social groups are relatively stable communities of people working at the same enterprise or organization, members of a social association or those sharing one limited but large enough territory, for example, people living in one district, city or region. The first type is called labour-organizational groups, the second one - territorial groups. People are united into labour-organizational groups to accomplish a certain purpose or objective that determines its composition, structure and type of activities, interpersonal interaction and relations.

Large social groups are stable numerous collections of people, who act together in socially significant situations in the context of the country or state, or their unions. They are classes, social layers, professional groups, ethnic groupings (nationalities, nations and races), demographic groupings (the young, the old, males and females) etc. With regard to all of them, a social group is a patrimonial, collective concept. People's affiliation to a large group is determined by a number of socially significant distinctions such as class affiliation, demographic factors, form and character of social activities etc. In large social groups, interaction bears both direct and indirect character.

According to the character of organization, groups are distinguished as formal and informal ones. Formal groups are collections of people whose activities are regulated by

formal documents such as legislative norms, charters, instructions, registered rules, bans or permissions sanctioned by the society, organization etc. At performing some activities members of the formal group are in terms of subordination, or hierarchically structured submission. Such groups are academic groups, labour organizations, military units etc.

Informal groups don't have formally registered grounds for their existence. They are formed on the basis of common interests or values, respect, personal affection etc. which cohere individuals into more or less stable entities such as a group of friends, a musical band, Internet chatters etc. Behaviour of their members is regulated by special non-written laws and rules. In such groups membership is voluntary, and members may resign at any time.

Due to emotional depth of interrelations within the group, primary and secondary groups are differentiated. A primary group is, as a rule, a small social group whose members share personal and enduring emotional relations which are established on the basis of direct contacts reflecting the members' personal characteristics. The examples are a family, a group of friends, a research group etc.

While studying human society sociologists are interested in larger groups of people at the meso - and macro-levels, or those ones called social communities. There are a lot of definitions of such a phenomenon but theorists agree that members of the community should possess a similar quality such as age, gender, job, nationality etc. and consider similarity as one of the main distinctions of the community. Examples are natural-historical communities like tribes, families, nationalities, nations and races; mass groups like crowds, TV audience etc.

A more important distinction of the social community is social interaction between its members. Interactions may be more enduring that determines a long-term existence of communities such as nations, races, and less enduring that is typical for occasional communities such as crowds, lines, passengers etc. But even occasional community with weak ties has its patrimonial and specific distinctions, regulating collective behaviour.

Besides similarity and social interaction, a social community also suggests that the actions undertaken by its members are oriented by expectations of behaviour of other individuals in the community. It encourages people's deeper solidarity that forms a cohered group - a basic element of the society. Judging by it, a social community may be defined as natural or social grouping of people characterized by a common feature, more or less enduring social relations, goal attainment, common patterns of behaviour and speculation.

A social class is also considered as a structural element of the society. Although approaches differ, in general the concept of a class is connected with people's relation to the means of production and character of acquiring wealth under a market economy. The known examples of a class are the nobility, bourgeoisie and proletariat. In each class society there are fundamental and non-fundamental classes. Fundamental classes are distinguished by a dominating way to produce material wealth within the socio-economic system (feudal, capitalist etc), for instance, under capitalism its fundamental classes are the bourgeoisie and proletariat. Non-fundamental classes are available because the rests of the previous relations of production are still kept in the society or new ones are emerging.

A social layer is an assortment of people who are distinguished by their social status and who perceive themselves cohered by this community. A social status is one's position (place) in the social structure of the society connected with other positions by the system of rights and obligations. The status of a teacher has its meaning only with regard to a student,

not to a passer-by or doctor. The teacher should translate knowledge to the student, check up how knowledge is learnt and assess it etc. The student should regularly attend lectures, prepare for seminars, pass credits and examinations in time etc. In other words, the teacher and the student enter into social relationships as representatives of two large social groups, as bearers of social statuses.

Social status is often considered as the "standing", the honour or prestige attached to one's position in the society. In modern societies, occupation is usually thought of as the main dimension of status, but even in modern societies other memberships or affiliations (such as ethnic groups, religion, gender, voluntary associations, hobby) can have an influence. For instance, a doctor will have a higher status than a factory worker but in some societies a white Anglo-Saxon Protestant doctor will have a higher status than an immigrant doctor of minority religion.

Every person can have several social positions, or statuses called by R. Merton a status set. Among them there must be the main status; it is a status used by the individual to identify himself or by other people to indentify a definite person. For males it is their occupation (a lawyer, banker, worker), for females it is a place of living (a housewife) but there exist other variants. It means that the main status is of relative character as it is not directly associated with gender, race or occupation. The main status is one that determines the person's way and style of life, patterns of behaviour, friends etc.

Sociologists differentiate between social and personal statuses:
· social status identifies the person's position in the society which he occupies as a representative of a large social group (occupation, class, nationality, gender, age or religion);
· personal status is the person's position in a small group identified by how the members of the group estimate and percieve him due to his personal qualities. Being a leader or outsider, winner or loser means to occupy a certain position in the system of interpersonal, not social relations.
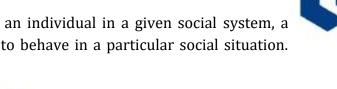
Statuses are also distinguished as ascribed and achieved ones. Ascribed status is a social status a person is given from birth or assumes involuntarily later in life. For example, a person born into a wealthy family has a high ascribed status.

Achieved status is a sociological term denoting a social position that a person assumes voluntarily which reflects personal skills, abilities, and efforts. Examples of achieved status are being an Olympic athelete, a criminal, or a teacher.

Achieved statuses are distinguished from ascribed statuses by virtue of being earned. Most positions are a mixture of achievement and ascribment; for instance, a person who has achieved the status of being a doctor or lawyer in Western societies is more likely to have the ascribed status of being born into a wealthy family.

The mentioned statuses are considered basic statuses which include kinship, demographic, economic, political and occupational statuses. There are also a number of non-basic statuses such as those of a passer-by, driver, reader, TV-watcher, witness of a road casualty etc. They are temporal positions and their rights and obligations are not registered as they are hardly fixed. No doubt, the status of a professor determines much in life of a certain person; as for his status of a patient, it does not.

If a social status identifies a particular position of an individual in a given social system, a social role represents the way that he is expected to behave in a particular social situation.

Each individual plays many roles in the society; in one situation he is a boss, in another - a friend, in the third - father etc. All roles that a person plays are called a role set.

Roles are identified as ascribed if we are forced to play and as achieved if we choose to play them. The first is a role of a son or daughter in relations with a parent, the second - a subordinate with a boss.

Roles have two further dimensions: the prescribed aspect of a role, or role expectations, and role performance. The prescribed element in any role provides a norm-based framework governing the way people are generally supposed to interact. People expect one conduct from a banker and quite another - from an unemployed person. Role performance is what a person really performs within this framework. Each time a person who performs a certain role builds his behaviour according to the expectations of the social milieu. If his actual behaviour differs from what is expected, it means that conformity to culturally appropriate roles and socially supported norms is not created. Behaviour, which doesn't correspond to the status, is not considered an appropriate role. For instance, if somebody came into the classroom, introduced himself as a teacher but then started painting the wall or washing the windows, his behaviour is a role but not that of a teacher.

In the society various social control mechanisms exist to restore conformity or to segregate the nonconforming individuals from the rest of society. These social control mechanisms range from sanctions imposed informally - for example, sneering and gossip - to the activities of certain formal organizations, like schools, prisons, and mental institutions.

Social institutions

Another structural element of the society is social institutions. These are not buildings, but organizations, or mechanisms of social structure, governing the behaviour of two or more people. Institutions are identified with a social purpose and permanence, transcending individual human lives and intentions. For example, the institution of the family and marriage, of religion etc.

Early mankind is known for promiscuity or non-regulated sex relations that could result in genetic degeneration. Gradually such relations began to be limited by bans. The first ban was that of incest, forbidding sex between kinship relatives, such as mother and son, brother and sister etc. The given ban is the first social norm, considered the most important in history. Later, other norms regulating sex relations appeared. People learnt to survive and adapt to life by organizing their relations with norms. Norms of family and marriage behaviour translated from generation to generation became collective habits, customs, traditions that regulated people's way of life and their thinking. Those who broke such traditions (deviants) were punished (sanctioned). This is the way how the most ancient social institution of the family and marriage might have emerged. And this is the way why norms and values have become structural units of the society.

As a society is created by the interaction of people, they establish ways of interacting that are acceptable or unacceptable. When a way of behaviour is both emotionally satisfying and leads to rewards from others, it becomes institutionalized. The way by which behaviour, custom or practice is institutionalized, is called institutionalization. For instance, institutionalization of any science means working out various standards, laws, setting up research institutes, laboratories, faculties, departments at universities, also publishing textbooks, monographs and journals, training specialists in the area etc.

If the purpose of fundamental institutions is to satisfy the basic needs of the society, non-fundamental institutions perform specialized objectives, serve particular traditions or satisfy non-fundamental needs. For instance, a higher school as a social institution meets the social need in training highly qualified specialists.

By its character of organization, institutions are subdivided into formal and informal ones. The activities of formal institutions are regulated by strictly settled directions such as law, charter, instructions etc. Formal institutions are often bureaucracies in which the functions of bureaucrats are impersonal, i. e. that their functions are performed independently of their personal qualities.

In informal institutions playing a very important role in interpersonal interaction, their aims, methods, means to achieve objectives are not settled formally and not fixed in the charter. For instance, organizing their leisure time, teenagers follow their rules of game, or norms which allow them to solve conflicts. But these norms are fixed in public opinion, traditions or customs, in other words, in informal sanctions. Very often public opinion or custom is a more efficient means to control an individual's behaviour than legislative laws or other formal sanctions. For instance, people prefer being punished by their formal leaders than being blamed by colleagues or friends.

Both formal and informal institutions have functions. To function means to bring benefit. So, the function of a social institution is the benefit that it contributes to the society. In other words, the outcomes or end-products of the system, institution and the like are referred to as its function. If besides benefit there is damage or harm, such actions are referred to as dysfunction. For instance, the function of a higher education is to train highly qualified specialists. If the institution functions badly due to some circumstances (lack of personnel, poor teaching, or methodical and material basis), the society will not get specialists of the required level. It means that the institution dysfunctions.

Functions and dysfunctions can be manifest if they are formally declared, perceived by everybody and obvious, and latent which are hidden, or not declared. To manifest functions of a secondary school those of getting literacy, enough knowledge to enter university, vocational training, learning basic values of the society may be referred to. Its latent functions are getting a definite social status which enables to become ranked higher than those who are illiterate, making stable friends etc.

Functions and dysfunctions are of relative, not of absolute character. Each of them can have two forms - manifest and latent. In one and the same time both a function and dysfunction may be manifest for some members of the society and latent - for the other ones. For instance, some people consider important to obtain fundamental knowledge at university, others - to establish necessary links and relations. Latent functions differ from dysfunctions by that they don't bring harm. They only show that the benefit from any institution (system etc) can be larger than it is declared.

To sum it up, each of the institutions reflects a different aspect of the society. Each of them performs a different role in the society fostering spiritual, social, or educational development. On a larger scale, these organizations exemplify the links that bind a society together.

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