



KAPITEL 5 / CHAPTER 5 ⁵

THE CONCEPT OF "SOCIAL PRACTICES" AND ITS ROLE IN MODERN SOCIAL KNOWLEDGE

DOI: 10.30890/2709-2313.2024-30-00-014

Relevance of the topic. The current realities in Ukraine raise many theoretical and practical issues related to our future. Constructivist tendencies in understanding social reality are gaining particular importance, attention is being paid to the study of the human world and everyday life, and the research focuses on routine interactions in social life. The latter is being developed and improved through a whole set of social practices. The study of social practices and the peculiarities of their manifestation in people`s everyday life is relevant in modern social sciences and is also of great practical importance.

Considering the state of war in Ukraine, it should be noted that modern practices can be diverse, both constructive and destructive, namely: to contribute to the consolidation of the Ukrainian political nation, the formation of a new level of its political culture of Ukrainian citizens, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, to negatively affect the state of political consciousness of Ukrainians, making them victims of manipulative technologies. That is why it is important for the Ukrainian scientific community to study and analyze social practices during the war and postwar period and to develop mechanisms for their implementation in everyday life. To do this, it is necessary to join the scientific discourse on social practices that are relevant today and to present our vision of this phenomenon. However, before analyzing individual practices, namely political, commemorative, educational, religious, habitual, etc., it is necessary to delve into the nature of this social phenomenon and analyze its essence.

The purpose of this chapter is to define the content of the concept of social practices and their structural elements.

Methods. The methodological basis for studying social practices is based on three important theoretical guidelines relevant to contemporary social philosophy and

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sociology.

Firstly, the connection between the concept of “social practices” and the description of social reality. Unlike the Marxist discourse, which knew only the category of “practice,” postmodern philosophers emphasize plurality as a worldview and methodological guideline for understanding any process. Plurality and multiplicity were elevated to the level of a principle, so they focus on the existence of many different social practices in the plural.

Secondly, social practices are studied in terms of everyday life and analyzed based on the methodological guidelines of background knowledge and the concept of “revealing practices.” The first position has its roots in the philosophy of L. Wittgenstein, and the second in the philosophy of M. Heidegger. The “background” and expandability of practices are related to culture as a way of being of a certain community, i.e., to the socio-cultural environment. “Background” is related to contextuality. The problem of context has actualized in connection with the triad of text-context discourse. Context has inherent cause-and-effect relationships, while “background”, metaphorically speaking, is “skimming the surface”.

Thirdly, the concept of social practices is inseparable from the theories of social action existing in modern sociology. It could be said that the core of any social practice is social activity or social action. In this context, it is advisable to consider the objectivist and subjectivist trends in non-classical sociology to understand the place of social action in social practices and the configuration of social practices depending on social action.

Results and discussion.

The discourse of social practices definition.

The scientific interest in the study of social practices as an independent phenomenon has emerged since the second half of the twentieth century, but the problem of social practices has deep roots and is associated with the figure of M. Weber, who first proposed the theory of social action.

The theory of social practices was developed by the classics of sociology, namely P. Berger, P. Bourdieu, M. Weber, L. Wittgenstein, M. Heidegger, G. Garfinkel, N.



Elias, E. Giddens, I. Hoffmann, T. Lukman, G. Ryle, M. Polanyi, T. Parsons, A. Schutz, and others. They viewed everyday life as a process that unfolds in ordinary, well-known situations based on self-evident expectations. Conceptualizations of the concept of social practices were developed within the framework of P. Bourdieu's structuralist constructivism, E. Giddens' structuration. Giddens, and G. Garfinkel's ethnomethodology. [1].

In the Ukrainian scientific discourse, the problem of social practices has been the focus of consideration by sociologists, philosophers, and psychologists, such as: M. Boichenko, O. Balych, I. Gubeladze, N. Kovalisko, O. Kochubeynyk, K. Nastoyashcha, Y. Zoska, T. Titarenko, V. Tarasenko, K. Cheremnykh, S. Yaremchuk, and others. They consider typologies of social practices depending on the topic and focus of the study [2].

To analyze the problem of social practices, we will use a leveled approach to the content of this phenomenon. If we recall the discourse on the problem of social practices in the late Soviet period, we can notice a kind of transition from a monistic understanding of practice to a pluralistic understanding of social practices. According to Mykhailo Boichenko in his article “The Multiplicity of Philosophical Practices of Hryhorii Skovoroda in Modern Reading”, “Ukrainian philosophy has largely overcome the Marxist legacy of the enlightenment interpretation of practice as the only possible and only correct practice - the practice of the world-historical process, which consists in social material production, in which everyone and everything are involved” [3, p.118]. This is because, at the end of the 70s of the XX century, the worldview paradigm in the social sciences changed: the monistic understanding of reality is replaced by a pluralistic vision of the world. This approach made it possible to realize the diversity of social practices and analyze each of them.

At the first approach to the problem of social practices, it can be interpreted as the development and transformation of the “social” world through a system of actions and interactions. According to N. Balich, “In modern sources, the phenomenon of social practices is described as: 1) a set of culturally accepted (traditional) ways of doing things or acting “out of habit”, following a rule, behaving in a ritualistic way; 2) a form



of social activity, a process-activity that has a transformative social character; 3) a function-activity aimed at the existence of positive social experience and real action in society; 4) specific social institutions (implementation technologies). [1,c.70]

Nowadays, we can distinguish three levels of social practices depending on the subject of activity, namely:

- 1) social practices of individuals in their daily activities,
- 2) social practices of groups and communities,
- 3) social practices of institutions and organizations.

In the context of the classical principle of the identity of thinking and being, we take into account the fact that ontologically and epistemologically these levels are correlated. Thus, the first level of existence and, accordingly, understanding of social practice is routine acts of practical actions of individuals in everyday life. Interpersonal relations in some social communities come to the fore here, and individuals become the subjects of practice.

The second and third levels of existence and understanding of social practice are related to the functioning of social groups and communities and the functioning of social institutions. At these levels, we can talk about social practices as systems of sustainable, massive social actions and interactions that are made possible by the mutually oriented role behavior of actors who ensure the functioning of the relevant social institutions. It should be noted that any simplification is conditional; in a real social environment, these levels of social practices reinforce each other and have a synergistic effect. An individual can use both formal and informal social practices within the same institution, social status, and roles throughout an individual's life.

Two types of social practices are also distinguished by the level of institutionalization, namely institutionalized and non-institutionalized. The first form the core of social life, they are more widespread, significant, stable and traditional. Non-institutionalized social practices are stochastic, changeable, they remain on the periphery of social life and are not incorporated into social institutions, and may even be deviant. In support of this idea, Balich emphasizes that “various forms of social practices can be institutionalized, become sustainable social and normative in public



life, while another part of them remains outside the framework of social and cultural norms and forms protest, countercultural manifestations of social activity - revolutions, wars, etc. Accordingly, social practices can contribute to the formation of new identities and allow a person to respond flexibly to social change, gaining new experience"[1, p.73].

The English sociologist E. Giddens emphasized that social practice is not created by social actors, but is only constantly reproduced by them and has such properties as orderliness, continuity and necessity. Social needs exist in the form of causal factors and participate in social reproduction, but only if they are realized in this capacity by those involved in this process and act by them. The reproduction of social practices indicates the stability of the social system. Giddens suggests that even social reality should be viewed through the prism of reproduced social practices. In this case, the analysis of strategic behavior, according to the sociologist, should be based on the following basic principles: "the need to avoid simplified interpretations of the inherent ability of subjects to cognize; a scientifically based approach to motivation; interpretation of the dialectic of control" [4, p. 393].

The nature of social practices can be explained by two approaches: 1) the "background" nature of the practice and 2) the "revealing" ability of practices.[5] The idea of the background or "background" as a holistic structure has its roots in Gestalt psychology. Everything that comes across in a certain way is perceived as a figure against a background. At the same time, the relationship between the figure and the "background" can change; what was a figure can become a "background" and vice versa. The essence of the "background" is that it is not something hidden, but at the same time, it is not noticed and functions as a condition that gives meaning to a specific figure. The basic understanding of background practice is the context against which statements and behavior are interpreted.

The content of the judgment directly depends on the "background". For example, we hear the words "I'm going to kill you". Let's imagine a situation where a young couple is having fun, and this statement is perceived as flirting. It can have the opposite coloration when a weapon is pointed at you. Against this "background," there is a direct



threat to life. L. Wittgenstein called such situations “language games,” where language and action are the same.

The philosopher of language John Searle, who was concerned with the idea of “background” practices, defined their logical place as follows: “For most cases, the literal meaning of a sentence or expression sets the conditions for its truth only if a set of background assumptions and practices is present”. In other words, understanding any statement, even the most elementary one, implies an implicit reference to the publicly available body of knowledge about how the nature of things works and how a given culture “works”. According to Searle, background practices are a set of (traditional) ways of doing things in culture, skills of dealing with different objects.”[6]

The second approach to understanding practices, namely the “revealing” nature of practices, is related to the problem of identities. It was initiated by M. Heidegger. Practices constitute and reproduce identities or reveal the main ways of social existence that are possible for a particular culture at a specific moment in history. In this sense, they are understood as various ordered sets of skills of expedient activity that enable a person to take place in a particular capacity (doctor, child, parent, hairdresser, woman). According to Hubert Dreyfus, late Wittgenstein's “background” practices are chaotic, while early Heidegger's practices are ordered and coherent, which can be clarified by a specific analytical method.[7]

The question of the nature of social practices was addressed by Michael Polanyi and Gilbert Ryle, who emphasized that most of the everyday actions performed by humans are routine, “automatic,” they are repeated without requiring special attention and reflection. In real life, signs, things, and phrases act as tools, and a person is a user with certain knowledge or skills, without which no activity is possible. Polanyi M. and Ryle G. explained “background” practices through the concept of knowledge and substantiated the differences between practical, implicit knowledge “how?” and substantive, propositional knowledge “what?”.

For example, Gilbert Ryle, explaining the difference between “how?” and “what?” knowledge, emphasizes that when an activity proceeds normally, without excesses, a person acts not as a thinking person reflecting on his or her reasoning, but



as a person acting. The knowledge that is demonstrated in action does not need to be spoken or explained. "...The skill of a surgeon lies not in his language expressing medical truths, but in his hands making precise movements with a scalpel." [8] Resorting to metaphors, we can speak of the surgeon's "smart hands."

Knowledge of "what?" describes an action, an application of something that can be expressed in words. It can be a recipe, or traffic knowledge, or a textbook in any discipline. The question arises: even if you have learned the rules, recipes, and instructions, will you be able to cook, play table tennis, or make a judgment? This knowledge does not guarantee its correct application. Successful activity requires a different kind of knowledge; the "how?" knowledge has an independent status, it is transmitted and assimilated in a completely different way than the "what?" knowledge.

Michael Polanyi cites three main characteristics of tacit knowledge.

The first characteristic is paradoxical: a person often does not know and cannot explain how to do something, even if he or she is proficient in the activity. In other words, practical knowledge does not require an explicit formulation for its application; sometimes there is no such formulation.

The second characteristic is the personal way of transferring knowledge - from teacher to student. The presence of a living example and samples of solving a particular problem, as well as constant training, and trial and error, distinguishes the transfer of practical knowledge from theoretical knowledge.

Since practical knowledge is embodied in specific skills, mainly bodily skills, and is manifested not in formulas, rules and statements, but in successful activities, acquiring such knowledge is learning. [9]

The third feature of tacit knowledge is its peripheral "background" nature. According to Gestalt psychology, human perception of the world is organized in such a way that either a part or a whole is perceived. If something is perceived as a figure or a focus, then the surrounding is perceived as a "background" or periphery. What is in the background, although not explicitly perceived, nevertheless determines what is brought to the fore. So, until we learn how to use a hammer, a piano, in short, they are the focus of our attention, and their use is difficult. As we learn, it moves to the



periphery of attention, to the gazelle of the “background,” and the person's attention is directed to the overall goal of the activity. The foreground and periphery of consciousness are mutually exclusive. If a lecturer is choosing words and thinking about how to express an idea, the content of the lecture is significantly impaired. Thus, the general mechanism of learning is that mastering a skill or tool means moving it to the periphery of consciousness or switching attention from the parts and details that make up an activity to the whole - its purpose and meaning.

Social practices as a unity of social space and time.

Going deeper into the essence of social practices, it is impossible to avoid the problem of the relationship between social space and social time, since this relationship is crucial for the formation and implementation of these practices. In line with my opinion is the opinion of N. Balych, who emphasizes that “Social practices have a spatial and temporal localization and may vary depending on the historical period, cultural characteristics of the country or region, state system, geographical location...”[1]. Since the emergence of society, we can discuss the emergence of a social chronotype. Studies of social space and time issues are relevant and necessary for analyzing social reality and social practices and predicting change trends. The main feature of contemporary social studies is the awareness of the fluidity of reality and the view of the social spatio-temporal continuum as one in the process of constant transformation. The social spatiotemporal organization of society is characterized by length (territory) and place (local structure created and mastered by a group of people).

In the first approach to the problem of social space, it is worth mentioning that social space is the space in which a person lives and functions, which is organized into various social forms. For each person, space is associated with the territory in which he or she lives, which he or she includes in his or her life activities.”[10] ”Social space is a variety of spaces in which contacts between social communities and individuals with a certain social behavior are realized, which are different in form and content. [11]

In public opinion, the problem of social space has been the subject of scientific discourse.

For example, the French philosopher P. Bourdieu believed that social space is



determinative and gives meaning to the physical component. “The space in which we exist and cognize is socially conditioned and constructed. Physical space is a social construction and projection of social space, a social structure in an objective state” [12, p.53]. The main concept of P. Bourdieu's theoretical constructions is distinctions, and differences. They are inscribed in the structure of social space, as it is perceived by the categories agreed with this structure. The structure is supported by the unequal distribution of different types of capital: economic, social, and cultural. The second important concept that describes social practices in the context of social space is the field. Space is embodied in various fields that sometimes overlap. It is in the field that objective structures are realized that are independent of the consciousness and will of agents, capable of directing or suppressing their practices or ideas, schemes of perception, thinking, evaluation, and action. All this is the content of the concept of habitus, the third component of P. Bourdieu's concept. It incorporates the social order and socio-spatial structure, so deeply that habitualized practices unfold semi-automatically, at a level that is not always conscious.

Social space is an abstract space constructed by an ensemble of subspaces or fields (economic field, intellectual field, etc.) that owe their structural unequal distribution to certain types of capital and can be perceived as a structure of distribution of different kinds of capital, functioning simultaneously as tools and goals of struggle in specific fields.

Realized physically, social space is the distribution in physical space of different types of goods and services, as well as individual agents and groups, localized physically (as bodies tied to a permanent place: fixed residence or principal residence) and providing opportunities to attract these more or less significant goods and services (depending on the capital they have, as well as on the physical distance separating them from this good, which itself depends on their capital). The double distribution of agents as biological individuals and goods in space determines the differentiated value of different areas of the realized social space.”[13, p.69]

German sociologist G. Simmel believes that space is social because it is mastered by humans. Because of this, it can have boundaries, which, in turn, are determined by



the spread of influence, connections, and areas of human activity. Therefore, the interaction of people to space is equated with its filling and gives it social significance. G. Simmel establishes a fundamental connection between space, time, movement, and social meaning. G. Simmel's approach allows us to distinguish between the space of physical geography and the sociological space. In other words, space can be considered as the space of:

- 1) groups or communities;
- 2) interaction and mutual influence
- 3) both location and movement
- 4) coexistence of social groups.

G. Simmel's concept of social space suggests considering it as a form of realization of events in the world. According to Himmel, space is determined by psychological characteristics, the “soul” of social action.

G. Simmel defines four spatial forms: first, the structuring of space by the principles of political and economic organization; second, the local structure arising from the relations of domination; third, fixed localities as an expression of social ties (family, military unit - each has its own “home”); fourth, space as an expression of neutrality, “no man's land” of state or metropolitan territories.

G. Zimmel analyzes social space, in particular, in the context of the social space of the city. He notes that at the very beginning of its existence, the city did not have a single urban space, but various communities existed and coexisted. The spatial and symbolic interaction of these communities led to the formation of the common space of the city. Urban space consists of semantic points formed in the course of the city's inhabitants' lives as a result of comprehending material and non-material living conditions. Their major function is to create a certain order that transforms space into a meaningful urban space. People fill the points with their symbols: power, entertainment, housing, temples, trade, etc. [8, p. 330].

G. Simmel's works pay great attention to the analysis of spatial dimensions of social interaction, forms of social distance, and social, physical, and psychological differentiation. He distinguishes five main characteristics of spatial forms: exclusivity



or uniqueness of space (each socially marked space - state, city, district, street has a peculiarity that is reflected in the specifics of interactions); movement of space (social groups or individuals - for example, tourists have the opportunity to change their location, thereby changing the overall configuration of space); boundaries of space (any spatial form is separated from others by boundaries. Boundaries can be marked by physical markers, such as state borders or road signs, but above all, boundaries are drawn by the existing social order); fixation of social forms in space (spatial localization of interactions, for example, in the conditions of home, work or leisure); spatial proximity and distance (all social interactions can be evaluated by the criterion of proximity - remoteness).

Moreover, spatial and social distances are not identical - in a modern city, many people do not know their neighbors, but maintain relationships with those who live at great distances). According to G. Zimmel, the use of the concept of social distance makes it possible to understand and explain many social processes and social types. In other words, distance is understood by the author as a way of differentiation - and here the focus of the study shifts to difference." [14]

A representative of the Annales historiographical school, A. Lefebvre, notes that "Social space is a product of the social". A. Lefebvre's unitary theory assumes the existence of three types of spaces: physical, mental, and social. They are inextricably linked to each other - each of them includes, reinforces, and presupposes the other. Lefebvre's spatial triad (the perceived, the conceived, and the lived) means that space is perceived through inclusion in social practices, conceived/comprehended in spatial representations, such as architectural forms, and lived through associations of images and symbols with a particular representation, which acquires and communicates the meaning of the respective loci, such as a house, a wilderness, a tourist attraction.

The corresponding triad is spatial practice, representations of space, and representative spaces. Thus, A. Lefebvre tries to convey that space is produced by a certain social structure. This structure can be divided into separate elements that create demand for this space, influence its formation, and consume it. It involves a set of social processes that are localized in a certain urbanized area. It is important to



distinguish between urban space and urban community. The latter may not have a spatial expression at all, and similarly, urban space can be structured to many urban communities, as well as to a set of individuals beyond spatially determined group characteristics [15]. Having analyzed the concepts of social space, it can be defined as a set of social practices that manifest themselves in everyday life and determine the perception of physical space. Social space is differentiated because the population is multidimensional, and the population, according to P. Sorokin, is a social space. In addition, the scientist notes that the more complex the differentiated society, the more numerous the parameters of social space [16]. P. Sorokin believes that the status of any person in the social world is determined by a system of social coordinates, which are set by a set of social groups and positions within each of them. For the scientist, social status is directly dependent on the place of residence, because moving up the social ladder can take real action, such as when people move to better and more prestigious areas when their status increases.

The second element describing the essence of social practices is time. The specificity of time comprehension coincides with the general vector in social development and reflects to a large extent how society perceives itself. Time is semantically linked to the dominant concept of the world. Social time is not a self-sufficient substance of society but demonstrates the specifics of a particular society. It is defined by practices that take place with varying intensity. It is the rhythm of social life that underlies the category of time.

In the early stages of society's development, the rhythms of social processes were slow, and social time was quasi-cyclic. The practice was guided by the repetition of the accumulated experience, and the reproduction of stable forms of behavior in the past, and this is why the past time is of particular value in the life of a traditional society. Characterizing the pace of transformation in the life of industrial and post-industrial society, it should be noted that social time tends to be constantly accelerating.

Nowadays, the pace of social time is accelerating considerably, which has made the question of the moral value of the time of individual human existence, which is turning from unique and exclusive to mass and faceless, relevant. In this aspect, we can



recall Z. Bauman's concept of a “fluid society”, where there is a simultaneous acceleration of social time and blurring of social space. As P. Stompka notes, “Time expresses the rhythm of social life, but at the same time, it determines this rhythm. Associated with various cultures, time takes on one or another hypostasis. It is culturally and, therefore, historically relative. Different societies “live in different times,” as the founders of the French school said. This also applies to smaller structures within societies-groups, organizations. Time in society is even different in different spheres of social life-family, economy, and politics, which have their particular sense of time. In this understanding, time is not a substance, but a network of relations that reflect and form specific, temporal dependencies between phenomena, events, or social actions. The most important are three types of relations: succession (“before and after”), linear sequences of unique, non-repeating, directed events, and cycles of repeated events that return to their initial state after a certain period.” [10, c.594]

P. Shtompka identifies the following social functions of time: synchronization of actions of individuals, groups, or organizations. Implementation of collective actions as an upward condition for the presence of people at a certain time in a certain place. “The first, universal requirement of social life,” he writes, “which is met by universally recognized time measurement systems, is the synchronization of the actions of individuals, groups, or organizations. In society, as we remember, many activities are of a group nature. For such activities to take place, a significant number of people must be in the same place at the same time” [10, p.608].

The second requirement is the coordination of actions, which implies a certain degree of coordination among all those involved in the joint process. An example is the schedule and timetable of passenger transport. “The second functional requirement, coordination, is a bit more complicated. Synchronization is a minimum requirement. But for a group activity to run smoothly and correctly, the various actions of the participants must not only be simultaneous, but also mutually coordinated. Such coordination is ensured, in particular, by the measurement of time.” [10, p. 608]

The third characteristic of social time is the ordering of actions. Many processes taking place in society have a certain sequence of accomplishment, priority and



fulfillment of tasks. The production of any goods and services is linked to the development of a sequence of technological operations. “Firstly, many social processes follow a certain logic, according to which actions or partial changes - stages or phases of the process - make sense only when they occur in a clearly defined sequence. Some must be done earlier, others later. It is not possible to varnish the car body first and then install the engine.” [p. 608]

The fourth characteristic is deadlines, which means the ability to perform actions within a limited time frame. Many businesses operate at set times, and to use their services, it is necessary to adhere to them, according to P. Shtompka, there are certain cultural conventions. “The fourth function of quantitative time is to determine the timing of certain actions. It happens that some actions are possible only when the appropriate means or conditions are available. A special kind of timing is that which guarantees the validity of actions.” [10, p.608]

The fifth feature of social time is the measurement of the duration of certain actions, which is an important social task. This includes determining not only the time of work and rest (the length of a working day, week, and all working time in a lifetime), but also age characteristics - the time of childhood, youth, and old age. “To organize daily life, it is necessary to determine working hours, vacation time, the number of hours children spend at school, and the length of prison sentences. The short or long duration can be a measure of achievement related to rewards, pay, promotion, etc.” [10, p.609].

The sixth requirement is the quality of time allocation. “To diversify the monotony and routine of life, it is important to allocate certain periods for certain types of activities and even to give some periods signs of unusualness, solemnity, or - to use a concept that Emile Durkheim used not only in the religious context - the character of sacrum” [10, p.610 P. Stompka writes: “In any society, there are certain days or periods that are given special significance - weekends, holidays, vacations, special events.... that involve emotional uplift, intense expressiveness of actions, temporal certainty, dimensionality.

The unity of social space and time or the space-time continuum is described by



the concept of chronotope. The chronotype symbolizes the uniqueness of social development in space and time, it reflects the dominant values and practices of their maintenance or regulation in different epochs. Thus, the chronotype of modernity is characterized by such attributes as the idea of progress, rationality, measurability and achievement, linearity of time, and limited space. This is the space of industrial production, bureaucracy, urban life, and the nation-state. Instead, the postmodern chronotype embodies the ideas of multivariance, the ambiguity of development, reflexivity, self-identification, nonlinearity, the multidimensionality of time, and blurred spatial boundaries. Peaceful coexistence of different forms of life: pluralism of cultures, social traditions, lifestyles, ideologies, and language games. Postmodernity correlates with the practices of consumption, cultural diversification, hybridization of urban and rural structures, and the emergence of imaginary communities.

Social action as the core of social practices.

After analyzing the two components that clarify the essence of social practices, it will be expedient to reveal the problem of social action as another element of the phenomenon under study, because “social practice can be considered both as a social action, and as a construct of consciousness, and as an element of culture.” [2;c.244]

The problem of freedom and necessity has always been in the focus of philosophers and sociologists. Therefore, it is important to answer the question: is human action free or socially conditioned? Is a person a free social actor or are his or her actions strictly determined by external factors?

It is not an exaggeration to say that “social action is the core around which all the wealth of the social, including rationally organized institutions of social order, ultimately revolves. And it is the analysis of social action that allows us to distinguish between objective and subjective components of individual behavior (micro-level), social order (macro-level), and social theory itself.” [17, p.204] Thus, it deals with different levels of social practices, ranging from individual to group and institutional.

In this regard, there was an ongoing discourse in non-classical sociology, the purpose of which was to realize where social action should be localized: at the macro-level or micro-level of society analysis?



In the twentieth century, there were the following main sociological paradigms in sociology: structural, focused on the analysis of the whole society and its components, and interpretive, focused on the study of interpersonal relations.

The main representative of the macro-level analysis of social action was T. Parsons, who tried to synthesize subjectivist (Weberian) and objectivist (Durkheimian) alternatives to the study of social processes. “Each ‘single act’ of social action, according to T. Parsons, consists of an actor (actor), meanings (means), goals, physical, social and cultural objects: norms and values.

In the theoretical model of T. Parsons, the defining characteristic of social action is the “end-means” relationship. As a result, the ideal of social action, in his opinion, is not the creative component, but the most pragmatic, goal-oriented economic behavior of individuals. T. Parsons' theoretical attempt to synthesize the objectivist and subjectivist approaches to social action in reality led to the priority of objectivism, which automatically resulted in insufficient attention to the individual specifics of human behavior.”[17, p. 205]

In contrast to the objectivist tradition of understanding social action, representatives of the subjectivist and intersubjectivity directions, in particular, phenomenological sociology, tried to correct the shortcomings of Parsons' system as a “sociology without a person” system.

Alfred Schutz was a representative of the subjectivist trend, emphasizing that social structure is the result of human interaction. The immediate source of this trend is the phenomenological direction in philosophy. Edmund Husserl, the founder of this trend, focused on the deep basis of human experience. In his work “The Crisis of the European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology,” Husserl proposes the category of the “life-world” (Lebenswelt), which he views as an intersubjective world, the world of everyday life.

“For phenomenological sociology, the ‘life-world’ is a central category that denotes the sphere of formation of any human intention. The “life-world” is the construction of the “natural attitude”, which Schütz defines as the “naive” point of view of a person in a particular situation and localized in a certain socio-cultural field.



In the visual and bodily consolidation of knowledge, Schütz saw the advantages of the world of everyday life in comparison with other areas of human experience, which he called “ultimate areas of meaning.” Along with everyday life, there are such areas as religion, sleep, play, scientific theorizing, artistic creativity, mental illness, etc. He defined these areas as ultimate because they are closed in themselves, and the transition from one area to another is not only impossible but also requires a certain effort, a kind of “semantic leap.” [17, p. 207]

A. Schütz understood social action as rationally thought-out human behavior that takes into account the relationship between ends and means. “If for Weber only purposeful, meaningful actions can be the subject of scientific analysis, and any goal is the starting point that determines the structure of action, then for Schütz, the basis of phenomenological sociology is, first of all, the concept of the subjective meaning of action, personal meaning. It is this understanding by the actor of the dependence of motives and goals on his biographically determined situation that the social scientist means when he speaks of subjective meaning. Formally speaking, only the actor knows what to do and why he/she does it”. [18, p.51]

The subjective aspects of social action were the focus of consideration by J. Homans, P. Blau, R. Emerson, and R. Hamblin, who developed the “theory of exchange. “The main methodological principle of Homans was the call for the ‘return of man to sociology’. Given that the subject of social action is a rational person, he proposed a simple and original theory that a person consciously chooses the direction of his or her behavior, taking into account possible positive and negative consequences.” [17, c. 207]

In the postmodern sociological discourse, there are different positions of sociologists on the definition of the essence of social action, but it does not insist on a single unambiguous answer. Sociologists are gradually abandoning the understanding of social action according to the “goal-means-result” scheme and are trying to interpret it as a variant of interpretation.



Conclusions.

Summarizing the material, the following points should be noted in understanding social practices.

First, social practices can be interpreted as the development and transformation of the “social” world through a system of actions and interactions. Or “Practices are separate social formations that determine the conditions of existence of social institutions and allow them to reproduce under new conditions.”[1] They have a three-level structure, namely individual practices, group practices, and institutional practices. The nature of social practices can be described by two main approaches: the “background” of practices and the “expandability” of space. Also, the problem of background (tacit) knowledge, as the knowledge that answers the question “how?”, is important for understanding social practices.

Third, social practices have social action at their core. All the diversity of social life revolves around a single act of social action. Social practices are realized in the routine acts of practical actions of individuals in everyday life, the existence and functioning of social groups and communities, and the functioning of social institutions. Institutionalized practices are the main ones in the structure of the social life of a society, as they are massive, significant, stable, and traditional. Non-institutionalized practices are stochastic, changeable, and peripheral. Society undergoes a constant process of changing social practices, namely, those practices that were previously considered marginal become central and institutionalized. Due to this cycle of social practices, a person has the opportunity to experience reality in a new way and look at the world from different angles.