

# Principles of Sociology

**DEPARTMENT OF ECONOMICS**

**ATHENS UNIVERSITY OF ECONOMICS AND BUSINESS**

**[Academic year 2017/18, FALL SEMESTER]**

**Lecturer: Dimitris Lallas**

# Principles of Sociology

## 12th Session

**Sociology in a globalized world: Social,  
Cultural, Political, Ecological Changes**

## ● Ulrich Beck

### ● Risk Society

- To Beck, the old, modern industrial society is being replaced by a new societal type, the ‘risk society’.
- Risk and uncertainty are the characteristic traits of our contemporary social world.
- The management of risk is the prime feature of the global order.
- Beck argued that we have to cope with a new kind of risks.
- The contemporary nature of the risks is related with the fact that risk now derives less from natural dangers or hazards than from uncertainties created by our own social development and by the development of science and technology.
- Contemporary risks have three main characteristics:
- **a)** they are products of human action (global warming or climate change as the product of excessive greenhouse gases from industrial pollution and modern transportation emissions over the past 250 years).
- **b)** it’s difficult to assess the degree of danger (the genetically modified crops are viewed both as means for facing the malnutrition in the world's poorest countries and as extremely dangerous about population health and viability of cultivations ).
- **c)** hazards are not restricted spatially, temporally or socially (pollution, terrorism cross national boundaries).

- Risks affect our everyday life, social relations and gender relations.
- Many new uncertainties have entered the relationships between the sexes.
- A generation ago, in the developed societies, marriage was an established process of life transition and connubial life was deemed as permanent situation.
- Nowadays, gender relations are more fluid and unstable, as many people live together without getting married and divorce rates are high.
- The loss of the fix model of marriage means that individuals have to take into account all the ‘variables’ that relate with the possibility of happiness, love, security, personal freedom.

## ● **Globalism and globality**

- U. Beck made the conceptual distinction between *globalism* and *globality*.
- *Globalism* is the view that the world is dominated by economics and that we are witnessing the emergence of the hegemony of the capitalist world market and the neoliberal ideology that underpins it.
- Beck supported that this viewpoint emphasizes unilaterally the economic phenomena and reduces the multidimensionality of global developments (ecology, politics, culture, and civil society) to a single economic dimension.
- Beck saw the world in much more multidimensional and multidirectional terms.
- Beck disagreed with a positive, idealistic assessment of capitalist development at global level, as he recognized that there are all sorts of barriers to free trade and that there are not only winners in this world market but also (many) losers.
- Beck promoted the idea and concept of *globality*, as this analytical scheme gives prominence to the crucial action of transnational agents, who go beyond and traverse the nation-states.
- These transnational processes are not simply economic but also involve ecology, culture, politics, and civil society.
- The origin of agents and the consequences of their action are not restricted to the local level.

## ● **Cosmopolitanism**

- Beck disputed the 'nation-state-based' thinking, which takes national societies as the main unit of analysis, as this 'national outlook fails to grasp that political, economic and cultural action and their (intended and unintended) consequences know no borders'.
- The idea of cosmopolitanism among other things seeks to overcome the traditional sociological focus on the spatially fixed nation and to replace it with a more fluid transnational focus.
- Beck was proponent of a cosmopolitan view on our globalized world.
- According to Beck, we have to abandon the way of sociological thinking that focus on nation-states and their international relationships.
- Our (scientific and political) duty is to adopt a cosmopolitan perspective on globalized world, as dealing with new risks presupposes transnational cooperation between states.
- This transnational cooperation is the proper way to face global problems.
- Beck's ideal is a cosmopolitan system based on the acknowledgement and acceptance of cultural diversity.
- Beck hopes the rise of transnational organizations and perhaps a transnational state.

- **‘Sub-politics’**
- Beck argues that new forms of activism are appearing.
- We see the emergence of a new field of what Beck calls ‘sub-politics’. This refers to the activities of groups and agencies operating outside the formal mechanisms of democratic politics, such as ecological, consumer or human rights groups.
- It’s critical for risk management the responsibility not to be left to politicians or scientists alone, but to include other groups of citizens.
- Groups and movements that develop in the arena of sub-politics can have a big influence on orthodox political mechanisms.

## ● Anthony Giddens

- According to Giddens, we live in a ‘runaway world’, as our contemporary social world is marked by new risks and uncertainties.
- Giddens proposes us to investigate the relations of trust in a risk world.
- Trust refers to the confidence we have either in individuals or in institutions.
- In a world of rapid transformation, traditional forms of trust tend to become dissolved.
- Trust in other people used to be based in the local community.
- Living in a more globalized society, however, our lives are influenced by people we never see or meet, who may be living on the far side of the world from us.
- Trust means having confidence in ‘abstract systems’.
- Trust and risk are closely bound up with one another.
- We need to have confidence in such authorities if we are to confront the risks which surround us, and react to them in an effective way.



- **Social reflexivity**

- Social reflexivity refers to the fact that we have constantly to think about, or reflect upon, the circumstances in which we live our lives.
- In traditional societies, people could follow established ways of doing things in a more unreflective fashion.
- Nowadays, many aspects of life that for earlier generations were simply taken for granted become matters of open decision-making.
- Giddens talks about a potential ‘democracy of the emotions’.
- By this term, Giddens refers to the emergence of forms of family life in which men and women participate in an equal fashion.
- The gender equality is not restricted only to the right to vote, but it also includes the personal and intimate relationships.
- The development of relationships on the basis of mutual respect, tolerance, understanding, contributes to the democratization of personal life.

## ● Zygmunt Bauman

- One of Bauman's critical contributions to sociological thinking refers to the issue of the 'frailty of human bonds', the feeling of insecurity that this frailty leads to and our responses to it.
- Bauman uses the metaphor 'liquid' to describe modern society, which he sees as characterized by constant change and a lack of lasting bonds.
- The contemporary anthropological type is 'the man without bonds' or at least the man without fixed, unbreakable ties.
- Bauman argues that, in a world of 'individualization', relationships are a mixed blessing; they are filled with conflicting desires, which pull in different ways.
- On the one hand, there is the desire for *freedom*, for *loose bonds* that we can escape from if we so choose, and for *individualism*.
- On the other, there is the desire for greater *security* that is gained by tightening the bonds between our partners and ourselves.
- We swing back and forth between the two polarities of security and freedom.
- Often we run to experts - therapists or columnists, for example - for advice on how we can combine the two.

- One response to the ‘frailty of human bonds’ is to replace quality in our relationships for quantity.
- It is not the depth of our relationships, but the number of contacts that we have which becomes important to us.
- Bauman notes that people now speak more of connections and networks and less of relationships.
- A relationship presupposes a mutual engagement and responsibility.
- Networks suggest only moments of being in touch.
- In a network, connections can be made on demand and broken at will.

## ● **Globalization as a ‘space war’**

- To Bauman, mobility is the most important and differentiating factor in social stratification in the world today.
- The winners of the space war are those who are mobile, able to move freely throughout the globe and in the process to create meaning for themselves.
- They can float relatively free of space, and when they must ‘land’ somewhere, they isolate themselves in walled and policed spaces in which they are safe from those who are the losers in the space war.
- The losers not only lack mobility but are relegated and confined to territories denuded of meaning and even of the ability to offer meaning (ghettos, refugee camps).
- Globalization translates into uneasiness for most of us.

- **Tourists/Consumers and Vagabonds**

- Bauman makes a distinction between two anthropological types, who adopt different strategies for living in the contemporary social world.
- The *tourists* are those who are on the move because they want to be.
- The *vagabonds* are those who are on the move because they cannot live in their home.
- The positive aspects of what we applaud as globalization are those that are associated with tourists, while an unavoidable side effect is that many others are transformed into vagabonds.
- Most people exist between these two extremes. They are unsure exactly where they now stand, but wherever it is, they are not sure they will be in the same place tomorrow.

## ● Bibliography

- Z. Bauman, *Liquid Modernity*, Polity, Cambridge 2000.
- Z. Bauman, *Liquid Times: Living in an Age of Uncertainty*, Polity, Cambridge 2007.
- A. Giddens & P.W. Sutton, *Sociology*, 7<sup>th</sup> edition, Polity Press, Cambridge 2009.
- A. Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity*, Polity Press/Blackwell Publ., Oxford 1996.
- S. Hall-B. Gieben, *Formations of Modernity*, Polity Press/Blackwell Publ., Oxford 1992.
- M. Hughes-C. J. Kroehler, *Sociology: The core*, 7<sup>th</sup> edition, The McGraw-Hill Companies, 2005.
- G. Ritzer, *Modern Sociological Theory*, 7<sup>th</sup> Edition, The McGraw-Hill Companies, 2008.