

'Global sociology' in different disciplinary practices: Current conditions, problems and perspectives

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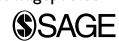
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Abstract

This article discusses perspectives for the formation of a truly 'global sociology', implying active, open, mutually beneficial and equal interaction between sociologists from different locations, countries and cultures, in their joint efforts to comprehend, explain and improve the social world. The study is based on the conceptual scheme proposed by Burawoy, highlighting four different disciplinary practices: 'professional sociology', 'policy sociology', 'critical sociology' and 'public sociology'. The formation of a 'global sociology' demands harmonious development and mutual enrichment between all the four 'sociologies', however, each of them has its own path in the global arena. The literature analysis demonstrates serious limitations in the global progression of 'professional sociology', while 'policy sociology' and 'critical sociology' also experience major difficulties. 'Public sociology', largely inspired by Burawoy, seems to be especially promising globally due to its key advantages: orientation towards non-academic audiences and a focus on the most acute social problems. However, currently this disciplinary practice has several fundamental constraints: marginality, radicalism, ideological bias and inherent conflict-orientation towards other 'sociologies'. Drawing on John Meyer's theory of 'Scientized Environment Supporting Actorhood', the article proposes the project of the new 'Global Solidarity Sociology', which utilizes the advantages of Michael Burawoy's project while overcoming its principal limitations.

Keywords

Global sociology, international sociology, professional sociology, public sociology, Scientized Environment Supporting Actorhood

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Introduction

In recent decades, globalization has been one of the most actively debated and intriguing topics in sociological communities worldwide. Globalization is, indeed, a most peculiar subject due to its dual meaning for current sociologists.

On the one hand, globalization has been among the key issues of sociological inquiries since the 1990s (Albrow and King, 1990; Beck, 1999; Robinson, 1998). Important contributions to understanding the corresponding phenomena and processes have been made by Sztompka (1988), Robertson (1992), Berger (1997), Beck (1999), Urry (1999) and many others. The literature suggests that the progress of sociologists in studying globalization and its various implications has been so significant that the ‘sociology of globalization’ is now, in the 21st century, at the center of the disciplinary domain (e.g., Alamuti, 2015; Martell, 2010; Martin et al., 2006).

On the other hand, globalization processes take place in sociological communities themselves, which is shown in the growing popularity of the notion ‘global sociology’ (Burawoy, 2009; Cohen and Kennedy, 2013). Unfortunately, here the achievements of our discipline are much more modest: assessments of the state of the art regarding sociology’s globalization are mostly negative (Bhabra, 2013, 2014; Heilbron, 2014; Martín, 2012). There are claims concerning the risks of growing relativism and confusion debilitating the international sociological community, which result from the integration of various representatives of non-western sociologies, bringing their diversified and often incongruous ideas, concepts and traditions to sociological practice (see Bhabra, 2013: 305). However, much stronger concerns relate, on the contrary, to the insufficient level of integration of ‘peripheral’ sociologies in the world’s mainstream, dominated by the American and European sociological traditions (Beigel, 2014; Heilbron, 2014; McDaniel, 2012).

Indeed, the words of the former President of the International Sociological Association, Margaret Archer, about ‘an increasingly global society which is met by an increasingly localized sociology’ (1991: 132), remain relevant still. Even more, over the decades this gap is growing progressively obvious and alarming. Since the early 1990s, despite all its controversies, globalization has strikingly expanded its influence on a planetary scale, entering and tying together even the most remote corners of the world (for example, by the spread of the Internet, as well as through the activities of international organizations and multinational corporations). However, sociology remains ‘far from global’ (see McDaniel, 2012: 826).

How to overcome this gap between a barely globalizing sociology and a progressively globalized world? How to make sociology truly ‘global’?

The starting thesis of the present article is that for a better comprehension of the current trends, problems and perspectives relating to the formation of a ‘global sociology’, it is necessary to take the broader approach, not focusing solely on the academic mainstream, but considering, along with the latter, a wider range of sociological practices and their interrelations. Academic sociology is not the only mode of sociological activity existing in the global arena. The immanent manifold nature of sociology (constituted of different disciplinary modes) opens perspectives for harmonious development and mutual enrichment between these various sociological practices, necessary for building a globally successful discipline. However, this manifold nature has another side, as it is

fraught with dangerous pitfalls resulting from a disregard for the interests of one type of sociology in favor of the other.

To distinguish and analyze the main forms of sociological activities, we utilize the conceptual framework proposed by Burawoy in 2004 (Burawoy, 2005). His scheme implies four different disciplinary practices: ‘professional sociology’ (academic mainstream), ‘critical sociology’ (critical considerations of the theories, methods and the underlying assumptions of the mainstream, oriented towards peer professionals), ‘policy sociology’ (applied research in the interests of the client outside the academy) and ‘public sociology’ (voluntary engagement with multiple non-academic publics in multiple ways) (Burawoy, 2005). It should be noted that the scheme offered by Burawoy is but one possible approach to understanding the structure of current sociology (largely criticized by McLaughlin et al. [2005], Turner [2005] and others). However, this scheme might be helpful for discussions on ‘global sociology’ for two reasons. First, it encourages a broader vision of the discipline not limited solely to ‘professional sociology’. Second, in our opinion, it stresses the mode of sociological practice (‘public sociology’), which, when substantially revised, might have special importance for globalizing our discipline in the 21st century.

The present article elaborates critical comprehension of each of the four types of sociological practice in terms of their achievements, problems, perspectives and interrelations in the global arena. Based on an analysis of the contemporary international literature, we argue for the development of an alternative project of global sociology (‘Global Solidarity Sociology’). We hope that our proposal will not only help to improve the particular type of sociological practice (‘public sociology’), but also contribute to the formation of a truly ‘global sociology’ benefiting from its internal diversity and celebrating mutually enriching interrelations between its various modes.

Considering ‘global sociology’ from a broader scope: Various types of disciplinary practice

What is ‘global sociology’? Current literature demonstrates certain differences in the understanding of this notion (see Bhambra, 2013, 2014; Lidskog et al., 2015). However, the majority of our colleagues worldwide would probably agree that truly and properly ‘global sociology’, primarily, implies an active, open, mutually beneficial and equal interaction between sociologists from different locations, countries and cultures, in their joint efforts to understand, explain and improve the social world.

Integrational processes in sociology have more than a hundred year long history: the first international associations and professional journals were established in the 19th century (Heilbron, 2014). However, in more recent decades the issue of internationalization has been especially urgent, gradually becoming an indispensable part of the discussions over the discipline’s state of the art and strategic perspectives. In the 1990s and 2000s, in the context of increasing global interdependence in various areas of life, the calls for a ‘global sociology’ rapidly intensified, originating in numerous locations all over the world (see Bhambra, 2013, 2014). Thus, the questions concerning the conditions, problems and perspectives of the ‘global’ (or ‘globalizing’) sociology in the 21st century reside at the top of the current agenda in international discussions.

The scope of consideration of these issues in the current literature is seriously limited by the dominating approach concentrated on the tendencies taking place in the academic mainstream (see Bhabra, 2013, 2014; Rosa, 2014; Sitas, 2014; Vessuri, 2015, and many others). However, academic sociology is not the only type of sociological practice in existence and other ‘sociologies’ may also have significant implementations and interesting perspectives in the global context. We believe that for a more comprehensive understanding of the globalization processes in the current sociology, the conceptual framework of the four types of sociology proposed by Burawoy (2005) might be helpful. These types, as noted already, include ‘professional’, ‘policy’, ‘critical’ and ‘public’ sociologies. Further, we critically review their current conditions, problems, perspectives and interrelations in the global arena.

Global ‘professional sociology’: Crisis and its causes

The current tendencies in the development of ‘*professional sociology*’ (or ‘academic mainstream’) in the global arena attract the greatest interest of researchers compared with the other types of sociological practice. The assessments of the state of the art in ‘*professional sociology*’ are usually based on the indicators relating to publishing in internationally acknowledged venues indexed in the prestigious ranking systems (Web of Science and Scopus) (see e.g., Sitas, 2014; Vessuri et al., 2013; Zincke, 2014).

Authors from leading locations (USA and Western Europe), as well as from ‘peripheral’ regions (rest of the world), point to the failure of the efforts to create an open, equal and integrative global academic community in sociology so far (Beigel, 2014; Bhabra, 2013; Vessuri et al., 2013). The extensive evidence from various places (South Africa, Nigeria, Chile, Argentina and many others) convincingly demonstrates that, despite the continuing calls for a ‘global sociology’, the international interrelations in academic life remain largely unequal, exclusive and discriminating (Beigel, 2014; Omobowale et al., 2014; Sitas, 2014; Zincke, 2014). Authors complain that sociologists from leading countries pay little attention to the elaborations of their colleagues from ‘peripheral’ locations. Heilbron (2014: 692) argues that the dominating direction of translations in the current sociological literature is from English, while, for example, translations into English account for only 2–3% of the national social sciences’ book production in the USA and the UK. In terms of international citation practices in prestigious arenas, USA and Europe show no sign of weakening their hold on the leading positions (Mosbah-Natanson and Gingras, 2014). This means that the old hegemonic centers of sociological knowledge production continue to ‘teach’ their dominated foreign partners, mostly, in a unidirectional way.

Indicative, in our view, is the study of Zincke, demonstrating that those sociologists from Latin America who manage to access the ‘central’ academic venues rarely cite colleagues from their home continent (fewer than 7% of references) preferring to discuss the American and European literature (Zincke, 2014: 709). At the same time, the Chilean sociologists publishing ‘locally’, on the contrary, largely tend to cite authors from Chile and other Latin America countries (accounting, in sum, for more than 55% of references) (Zincke, 2014: 713). This illustrates the serious difficulties in bringing local ideas, expertise and knowledge from the sociological ‘periphery’ to the international ‘central’ discussions.

The problem may not be the insufficient quality of these potential contributions from ‘peripheral’ sociologies, but rather the lack of institutional mechanisms stimulating their integration into international academy. Several papers demonstrate that bringing non-western sociological ideas and experience to the current international mainstream may be helpful for improving the certain difficulties faced by academic sociology (see e.g., Maia, 2014; Sorokin, 2015a, 2015b).

In light of these negative tendencies, much of the current literature calls for a fundamental transformation of the international sociological mainstream (Bhambra, 2013, 2014; Rosa, 2014; Vessuri, 2015; Vessuri et al., 2013). Most often, the primary target of the proposed reform is ‘Eurocentrism’, inherent to the sociological practice in the leading international venues (Bhambra, 2013, 2014), which prevents the formation of a truly ‘global sociology’, open to theoretical and methodological insights from all over the world. However, two questions arise concerning these calls. First, is it possible to escape ‘Eurocentrism’ with all its explicit and latent manifestations in the context of the established structure of the international sociological academy with its rigid hierarchy? Second, is the persistence of ‘Eurocentrism’ really the major cause of the continuing failure of attempts to make academic sociology truly ‘global’?

Regarding the first question, unfortunately, the advocates of the project for an ‘anti-Eurocentric reformation’ of the sociological academy have insufficient resources to overcome the existing structure and change the ‘rules of the game’ in the international academic ‘sociological field’ (see Burawoy, 2005, 2014a; Heilbron, 2014; Mosbah-Natanson and Gingras, 2014). The established system is closely connected with the official rankings of scholars, institutions and even countries by the level of so-called ‘scientific excellence’ largely determining the financial flows in the academic world (see Vessuri et al., 2013). In the context of the growing commercialization of science (Burawoy, 2014b), securing the existing shape of the sociological academy is in the interests of powerful national and international agencies ready to defend them.

Approaching the second question, we shall refer, mostly, to the works of one of the leading ideologists of the ‘anti-Eurocentric movement’ in current sociology, Bhambra (2013, 2014). She claims the whole apparatus of sociological knowledge to be principally incorrect due to the taken-for-granted assumption that European experience should stand as an ultimate reference point for understanding social transformations all over the globe (Bhambra, 2013). Bhambra believes that the current sociological language and underlying analytical schemes should be fundamentally revised based on the reassessment of the social world and, correspondingly, its social science as ‘post-colonial’ (Bhambra, 2013). She argues that existing attempts to create sociological tools, allowing deeper consideration of the inherent diversity of current societies, are insufficient. Bhambra focuses on the ‘multiple modernities’ approach, suggested by Ulrich Beck (2000), claiming it to be parochially misleading and only imitating the movement towards a properly ‘global’ sociology, while retaining focus on Europe as ‘reference standard’ for all societies, and, thus, remaining ‘Eurocentric’ in its essence (Bhambra, 2013).

Despite the theoretical soundness of the arguments provided by Bhambra, it is highly unlikely that the revision of the current ‘professional sociology’ from the ‘post-colonial’

or ‘de-colonial’ perspective would lead to the fundamental breakthrough towards a truly ‘global’ sociology, implying fruitful academic cooperation between sociologists with different cultural backgrounds.

Any large-scale revision of sociology’s conceptual apparatus would inevitably require that certain notions and propositions should remain as starting reference points. In this sense, Ulrich Beck’s approach may be explained not by the hidden desire to secure the ‘Eurocentric’ orientation of international sociology, but rather by the largely unconscious, self-evident and natural choice of the most deeply ingrained assumptions as the conceptual foundation.

Finally, even if we assume that the fundamental rejection of ‘Eurocentrism’ in all of its multifaceted manifestations is principally possible, we face the risk of running into other forms of ‘centrism’ (for example, ‘Asia-centrism’, ‘Africa-centrism’, ‘Latin-America-centrism’), which would also not be the best solution.

The literature review demonstrates that, unfortunately, in the immediate future it is barely possible to make international ‘professional sociology’ truly ‘global’. However, this does not mean that we have to stop our efforts in making ‘professional sociology’ more open to the insights from the ‘periphery’. On the contrary, under current conditions, it is crucial to expand the debate against prevailing indexing systems, notwithstanding all the difficulties involved. Traditional networks of publication and evaluation of social scientific journals are necessary for the production of knowledge. For these purposes, ‘global’ sociology definitely requires maintaining the academic dimension, with all that this involves. Efforts made with regional indexations, such as Scielo in Latin America (Zincke, 2014), constitute an important advance already.

However, despite the necessity for continuing efforts aimed at globalizing ‘professional sociology’, these attempts would never be sufficient for making our discipline truly ‘global’ due to the inherent limitations of this type of disciplinary practice. Focused on developing international intra-academic communication, global ‘professional sociology’ may overlook the various challenges that ‘peripheral’ societies and, consequently, their ‘local’ sociologies currently face. One of the most important problems here might be the weakness of academic communities outside the ‘Global North’ and their high dependence on the extra-academic institutional context.

‘Policy’ and ‘critical’ sociologies: State of the art and perspectives in the global arena

‘*Policy sociology*’ also experiences negative tendencies in the global context. Several studies, for example from Iran (Bayatrizi, 2010) and Russia (Radaev, 2013; Sorokin, 2015b), demonstrate that the national state remains the key client of sociological applied research, making it ideologically biased, insufficiently qualified and closed to international cooperation. The strongest complaints of sociologists from ‘peripheral’ countries relate to, first, the ideological distrust of governmental structures towards sociologists and their expertise (Bayatrizi, 2010: 826; Zdravomyslova, 2008: 407), and, second, the weak connection between the results of applied research and the concrete policy actions undertaken by the officials (Carden, 2004: 136; Wiles, 2004: 31; see also Grundmann and Stehr, 2010).

Under current conditions, large-scale international cooperation in the field of ‘policy sociology’ takes place, mostly, in the context of the initiatives of powerful organizations like the United Nations, UNESCO and others. Sometimes these enterprises are quite successful. We may find shining examples where the engagement of sociologists in the work of international monitoring and policy-making structures has stimulated elaboration of new instruments for measurement and regulation of social, political and economic development at the global level (for instance, the work of Amartya Sen on the ‘Human Development Report’ of the UNDP has been very influential; see Anand and Sen, 1994). International organizations also contribute to circulating sociological knowledge between ‘periphery’ and ‘center’, for example, the famous ‘dependency theory’ elaborated by Cardoso, Faletto and others (see Cardoso and Faletto, 1979) which emerged with the support of ECLAC, a United Nations structure.

However, there are alarming claims that due to the inherent political and economic orientations of the leading international agencies, their initiatives strategically focus on promoting a neoliberal agenda and continuing marketization (even when this is done under the banner of ‘human rights’) (see Amsler, 2008; Burawoy, 2008). Hence, although these organizations stimulate certain cooperation between ‘policy’ sociologists in the global arena, there is still a need to search for new ways to advance this disciplinary practice, which becomes highly urgent under current conditions. On the one hand, the rapid aggravation of international relations in the fields of economic, cultural and political processes, observed in recent years on a planetary scale, makes the calls for a ‘global policy sociology’ highly relevant. On the other hand, the existing contradictions between various national and international policy-making agencies seriously hamper the emergence of the global institutional mechanisms necessary for efficient cooperation among ‘policy’ sociologists.

The next type of sociological practice in Burawoy’s scheme, ‘*critical sociology*’, compared with the other two ‘sociologies’ considered previously, has had greater achievements in the global context, which may be seen as the result of creative and fruitful collaboration between representatives of the sociological ‘center’ and the ‘peripheries’, and not as an outcome of European and/or North American domination. Particularly strong and visible is the aforementioned current tendency of sociologists worldwide (including representatives of the prosperous ‘Global North’) to critically consider the ‘Eurocentric’ inclinations of the international academic mainstream. Even though in contemporary literature there is no agreement regarding the solutions to this problem (see Bhambra, 2013), such an international ‘attack on Eurocentrism’ is the important feature of the emerging ‘global critical sociology’. Various suggestions regarding possible ‘alternative’ directions for international academic sociology development come from across the globe (Alatas SF, 2002, 2006; Alatas SH, 2006; Behbehanian and Burawoy, 2014; Connell, 2007). Probably, one of the most powerful movements tries to elaborate the ‘Global South’ project of sociology (see Maia, 2014; Rosa, 2014).

However, there are two key obstacles limiting the perspectives of ‘critical sociology’ as a possible basis for the formation of a successful and efficient ‘global sociology’.

First, the weak position of ‘critical sociology’ in the current international sociological hierarchy: at least, in the developed countries it is largely dominated by the ‘professional’ and ‘policy’ sociologies (Burawoy, 2005).

Second, the most important problem of ‘critical sociology’ is its principal orientation towards the academic audience. As we have noted previously, academics, entering the global arena, are forced to follow the ‘Eurocentric’ and often discriminating ‘rules of the game’, defined by the leading centers of sociological expertise from the ‘Global North’. In the ‘peripheral’ world academic sociological communities may be less engaged with the international ‘sociological field’ and, hence, more sensitive to the arguments of ‘critical sociology’, but they are still incapable of producing a strong impact, being too weak and sparse in their institutional environment.

These factors drastically reduce the capabilities of ‘critical sociology’ in promoting truly ‘global’ sociological enterprises, implying open interrelations between scholars and ideas from the sociological ‘center’ and ‘peripheries’.

‘Public sociology’: A global success?

In spite of all the problems and difficulties in the development of international sociology in recent decades, the 21st century has given birth to one form of disciplinary practice having significant achievements and, possibly, the brightest perspectives in the global arena. This is the ‘public sociology’ proposed by Michael Burawoy, whose famous call in 2004 resonated loudly among sociological communities worldwide (see Burawoy, 2005). The literature demonstrates that sociologists from around the globe actively engage in local communities helping to solve concrete problems by shaping and supporting various civil initiatives, for example in India (Sundar, 2014), China (Lee and Shen, 2009), Latin America (Rodríguez-Garavito, 2014), Africa (Von Holdt, 2014), continental Europe (Revers, 2009) and the UK (Gabriel et al., 2009). Burawoy cheerfully greets the observed success of ‘public sociology’ (2014a, 2014c).

However, two questions arise concerning the global development of ‘public sociology’. First, how much real and genuine is this seemingly ‘global’ advancement? Can the international enthusiasm observed in ‘public sociology’ lead to the formation of a truly collaborative and meaningful international sociological practice? The second concern is whether the success of ‘global public sociology’ could be beneficial for the discipline as a whole, taking into consideration the interests of all the existing types of sociological practice.

Approaching the first question, we find that, on the one hand, globalizing ‘public sociology’, obviously, does not face the fundamental problem, typical of the international professional mainstream, relating to the rigidly hierarchical internal structure, shaping the *a priori* unequal conditions for the interactions between sociologists from different locations.

On the other hand, the movement’s activists complain that global ‘public sociology’ has serious problems with internal communications and integrity. Behbehanian and Burawoy (2014) note that their experiment, aimed at the promotion of ‘public sociology’ among students in different national contexts, demonstrated that several groups of activists, scattered among the remote parts of the world, could hardly engage in meaningful joint discussions on public sociology’s issues. Authors admit that the key difficulty in connecting remote groups of ‘public’ sociologists is that each group has its own local communities with their own problems, which inevitably makes other activists of the

movement nothing more than a ‘passive’ audience (Behbehanian and Burawoy, 2014: 288). The primary accent on local communities is crucially important for Burawoy’s project as it implies the possibility of direct and transformational engagement of sociologists in the particular civil movement and personal participation in its actual practices (namely, ‘organic public sociology’) (see Burawoy, 2005, 2008). If the targeted audience of ‘public’ sociologist becomes bigger than the local, the perspectives for successful impact on its practical actions become questionable.

Burawoy calls for sociologists all over the world to engage in the activities of civil societies, helping them in the unequal struggle against growing ‘third-wave marketization’, the tyranny of states and other forms of social injustice (Burawoy, 2008). The general vision implies that each and every ‘public’ sociologist in his/her personal sector of the ‘front-line’ in this ‘war’ would feel the invisible presence of colleagues. In fact, in most cases, the joint publishing and international conferences, so far, limit cooperation in the field of ‘public sociology’ on the global level. The literature demonstrates that a shared ideological spirit unites these activities more strongly than the attempts at concrete collaborative projects and efforts towards actual conceptual, theoretical and methodological innovations. Particularly illustrative, in our view, are Burawoy’s complaints that even simple international meetings are not always possible to organize because current ‘public’ sociologists face difficulties in combining their careers as public activists and academics (Burawoy, 2014c: 137; see also Noy, 2009).

Hence, we may conclude that the current state of the art in the global ‘public sociology’ may not be as triumphant as it seems at first glance. However, of all the four types of sociological practice analyzed, Burawoy’s ‘public sociology’ remains, in our view, the most promising in terms of its resonance in the global arena in the 21st century. It was definitely not a coincidence that the annual meeting of the American Sociological Association in 2004, titled ‘For public sociology’, became the highest attended meeting in the history of the ASA (partly due to active international participation) (Burawoy, 2005: 5).

The fundamental foundation of ‘public sociology’, universally and internationally shared by all supporters of the movement, is the basic formula proposed by Burawoy (2005, 2008, 2014a). This formula advocates social action defending ‘civil society’ in the form of political protest against the expansion of the market and state forces worldwide. However, the question is how good is this formula? Does it bring benefits to our discipline from a strategic perspective, including the interests of the other types of sociological practice?

As noted in the literature (see McLaughlin et al., 2005; Shrum and Castle, 2014; Sorokin, 2015b; Turner, 2005, among others), the conceptual scheme proposed by Burawoy has an abstract, strongly ideological and over-politicized character. In our view, the most serious risks of global ‘public sociology’ generate from these features, threatening the strategic perspectives of our discipline. An example of the impact that the domination of ‘public sociology’ (including its ‘organic’ forms) in the national sociological tradition may have for the development of the discipline in the long term can be found in the literature (Sorokin, 2015b). Based on the Russian sociological tradition’s experience of more than 150 years, several pitfalls of ‘organic public sociology’ (as understood by Burawoy) were revealed and examined: first, the over-politicization and ideological bias

of sociological activities; second, the ‘personal sacrifice’ of the sociologist as a romanticized practice, potentially harmful for the discipline; third, the difficulties of ‘professional sociology’ institutionalization; fourth, the defectiveness of ‘policy sociology’ development (Sorokin, 2015b). Even though the study referred to is limited to the Russian experience, it might be helpful for a better understanding of the risks that relate to ‘public sociology’ development in various national and global contexts.

Therefore, the promotion of global ‘public sociology’ inspired by Burawoy, may emerge, first, as not so triumphant, and, second, as not so beneficial for the development of our discipline from a strategic perspective, as it may appear at first glance.

Current sociology faces the challenge to become ‘global’ in a very complicated situation. On the one hand, the two internationally dominating types of disciplinary practice (‘professional’ and ‘policy’ sociologies) experience fundamental and largely insuperable difficulties. On the other hand, potentially the most globally effective and resonant type of sociological practice (‘public sociology’) hides serious long-term risks and, thus, becomes not a vehicle, but rather an obstacle for the formation of a prosperous ‘global sociology’ from the strategic perspective. It is crucially important that by ‘prosperous’ sociology here we imply the simultaneous prosperity of the various types of sociological practice and their mutual enrichment.

Therefore, the necessity of a continuing search for new paths towards ‘global sociology’ becomes obvious. Hence, the question is, what should they be?

Burawoy’s ‘public sociology’: Strategic advantages in the global arena and constraints in its implementation

One of the possible approaches to search for an alternative direction in creating a truly effective, equal and powerful ‘global sociology’ is, first, to take into account the key advantages of Burawoy’s ‘public sociology’, and, second, to reveal and try to overcome its constraints, potentially harmful for the discipline.

In our view, there are two key benefits of Burawoy’s project in terms of its potential to shape ‘global sociology’ – first, its orientation towards audiences outside of the academic community, and, second, its focus on the most acute social problems. However, as we shall try to demonstrate, the concrete implementation of each of these strategic advantages in Burawoy’s formula reveals the key limitations of his program.

First, Burawoy reasonably argues for addressing non-academic social groups, which he calls ‘publics’ (2005, 2008, 2014a). He notes that in many ‘peripheral’ countries ‘public sociology’ is the only possible mode of disciplinary practice due to an insufficient institutional environment for the development of the other types of sociology (2005: 20). Indeed, in the context of weak national academic communities, sociologists often have to seek support and acknowledgment outside the academy. As shown previously, the attempts at applied research (‘policy sociology’) are scarce and rather problematic in ‘peripheral’ locations. Meanwhile, we must also admit that the crisis of ‘policy sociology’ is noticeable in the developed countries as well (see e.g., Savage and Burrows, 2007).

At the same time, the recent international experience of Burawoy’s ‘public sociology’ proves that larger social groups might have better perspectives to address sociological messages, which is particularly evident in ‘peripheral’ countries.

However, the problem of the current global ‘public sociology’ is that Burawoy limits its target audience, primarily, to the dominated and discriminated groups, which he sees as the essence of ‘civil society’ (2005: 23–25). Even though such interpretation has been, so far, enough to provide the powerful response to his call on an international scale, this approach seriously confines ‘public sociology’s’ perspectives, making it hostile in relation to other social layers and communities not experiencing discrimination. Following Pierre Bourdieu, Burawoy openly defines sociology, as a whole, as an ‘inconvenient truth’ (2014a: 153), thus a priori distancing it from constructive communication with those social groups that do not feel strongly subjugated by the powerful agencies of market or state.

Second, Michael Burawoy rightfully claims a focus on the most serious problems experienced in contemporary societies. This accent on the real social ‘illnesses’ in the various local and national contexts and the desire to help cure them, in our view, shapes the pivot of the international relevance of the ‘public sociology’ project, bringing it close to the actual concerns of the common people all around the globe.

Unfortunately, in discussing the problems of the current world, Burawoy promotes a highly ideological vision of ‘public sociology’, reducing its role to a ‘war’ (2014a: 153) with marketization and the tyranny of states. The leader of the movement calls for powerful political action in the form of, primarily, protest. This makes ‘public sociology’, to a large extent, a radical, marginal and conflictual enterprise (especially in its ‘organic’ forms, which Burawoy particularly advocates [2005, 2008]). In the short term, it may attract great interest on the part of the various publics. However, in the strategic perspective, ‘public sociology’ might appear not only an instrument for solving social problems, but also a social problem itself, supporting dangerous conflicts and even allowing so-called ‘non-orthodox’ methods, which imply direct violation of the law (Bello, 2014).

Especially interesting and complicated for the proper comprehension of Burawoy’s initiative is the question of the interrelations between the four modes of sociological practice. On the one hand, using glowing metaphors, Burawoy (2005) claimed that each type of ‘sociology’ is equally important and each part in this beautiful disciplinary organism is necessary for the flourishing of the whole. However, the detailed analysis of his Presidential address suggests that its central claim was not the integrity and balance between the four different ‘sociologies’ and their fragmented elements, but rather the promotion of the single element of a particular type of sociology, namely, the ‘organic’ form of ‘public sociology’ (see Sorokin, 2015b). This comes naturally, as Burawoy’s ‘public sociology’ gets into obvious strategic conflict with the interests of the other modes of disciplinary practice. For instance, declaring ‘war’ on state and market establishments, it potentially makes enemies of the possible corporate clients of ‘policy sociology’ and even of the government itself, which provides the very institutional existence of sociology as an academic discipline.

As we can see, the project of ‘public sociology’ initiated by Burawoy demonstrates the strong advantages of shaping ‘global sociology’ based on communication with non-academic audiences and focused on acute social problems. At the same time, his program is too marginal, radical, ideologically biased and over-politicized. Another highly important issue is the inherent conflict-orientation of ‘public sociology’ towards other ‘sociologies’ (clearly observed despite the declared intentions of Burawoy to build mutually beneficial interrelations between the four outlined modes of sociological practice).

We believe that the new attempts to create a truly ‘global’ sociology could avoid these limitations while utilizing the positive experience of Burawoy’s project. The next section offers several suggestions for building a new vision of ‘global sociology’.

Towards an alternative approach to making sociology global: ‘Global Solidarity Sociology’

In the context of the current domination by the so-called ‘Global North’ in the international sociological ‘field’ (Burawoy, 2008), it is not surprising that in large part the discussions, suggestions and hopes regarding the formation and development of ‘global sociology’ focus on the issues relating to ‘professional sociology’ (or ‘academic mainstream’). However, as we have tried to show, the hierarchical structure, peer-orientation and self-referential practice of ‘professional sociology’ make it almost impossible to build a powerful, open and equal ‘global sociology’ based only on intra-academic communication. The institutional weakness of professional communities in ‘peripheral’ locations makes sociologists seek other types of disciplinary practice beyond the academic-oriented ‘professional’ and ‘critical’ sociologies. At the same time, unfriendly authoritarian and oligarchic regimes in the developing countries along with insufficient institutional mechanisms for international cooperation in applied research hamper the development of global ‘policy sociology’.

In this situation, the international experience of Burawoy’s ‘public sociology’ (despite all its limitations) demonstrates potential benefits for global sociological practice oriented towards wider non-academic communities. It also confirms that sociologists can make the difference in terms of a real impact on the various social issues in local, national and international contexts. However, constructing effective and engaging global communication between sociologists, as well as between sociologists and their various audiences, in the 21st century requires deep comprehension of the current tendencies in social development on the macro-level and identification of the core agencies driving social change. In our view, the idea of ‘Scientized Environment Supporting Actorhood’, elaborated by John Meyer (2010), might be helpful in this regard.

According to Meyer, in recent decades the fundamental transformations take place in society, promising serious changes in the principal role of social science and shifting its place in the world. He argues that a new era has come, the era of ‘expanded human agency’, when social changes are initiated by voluntarily ‘public organized action’, guided not by self-interest, but by the abstract ethical principles legitimized by ‘the scientized environment’ (Meyer, 2010: 8). This legitimization is provided, mainly, by social scientists becoming the key figures inspiring social change. It is particularly important, according to Meyer, that this legitimization is ‘little related to the immediately perceived functional or instrumental requirements’ (2010: 8). It also ‘goes far beyond the actual competence of the scientific knowledge system’ (2010: 8). Meyer argues that this ‘scientized environment’ largely enables and directs social action in the 21st century.

Drawing on Meyer’s conception, we argue that in the current conditions the most efficient and potentially engaging format of global sociological communication would be the understandable, problem-oriented and ethically grounded interpretations of social reality, indirectly generating transformative social actions (including those on the global scale)

but not necessarily implying the actual participation of sociologists themselves. This approach suggests that sociologists should appeal not to the clichés of political ideology but to the fundamental ethical considerations, free from direct politicization.

The problem of determining the basic ethical foundations of the new ‘global sociology’ is, in our view, central for the future of our discipline, requiring careful consideration and the joint efforts of sociologists worldwide. Taking into account the complex intersection between various ethical systems and their agents coexisting in the current global world, this question can under no circumstances be left out of the discussion by relying on a traditional scientific conviction about the universally global science, not connected with ethical issues at all or having ‘self-evident’ (meaning ‘Eurocentric’) ethical foundations.

We believe that these ethical principles would emerge gradually with the growing experience in open and equal interrelations between different national academic communities, as well as between sociologists and their practical clients or wider publics.

It is not possible to suggest a comprehensive list of the potential ethical foundations of a new ‘global sociology’ in the current article; however, this problem has to be addressed urgently. It is necessary to overcome the dangerous tendencies of sociology’s marginalization and ethical radicalism, which are getting stronger with promotion of Burawoy’s over-politicized and aggressive ‘public sociology’. Hence, the first step in discussions regarding the ethical foundations of the new global sociological practice would be to understand what these foundations definitely should not be. It is principally important that they should not be based upon the ideas, images and slogans of ‘war’, ‘conflict’, ‘struggle’ and the relating aggressive rhetoric, which is a distinctive feature of Burawoy’s ‘public sociology’ (2005, 2008, 2014a) and several other initiatives (see e.g., Bhambra, 2014: 453; Reddock, 2014).

Burawoy agrees with Bourdieu in admitting, as a bald fact, that it is in the nature of sociological knowledge to aim at revealing the discrimination, oppression and subjugation pervading the social world, and, therefore, dominant social groups would unavoidably be hostile towards the discipline (Burawoy, 2014a). However, do we necessarily have to declare the primary goal of sociology as a ‘struggle’ with its ‘enemies’? Do we not put ourselves in a marginal and aggressive position by focusing on the negative side of the social world? Indeed, there is subjugation and oppression in every society, but also every society has solidarity potential offering a chance for constructive dialog. These solidarity forces should be at the core of the new ‘global sociology’ project and its positioning in external communications. Properly ‘global’ sociology must be constructive and optimistic. Such a project may be titled ‘Global Solidarity Sociology’.

However, trying to globalize sociology based only on a single type of sociological practice is a path to nowhere. The truly ‘global’ sociology has to combine organically all the four modes of disciplinary practice, providing their mutual enrichment and constructive dialog. Only through such integrity on a global scale between reliable scientific knowledge (‘professional sociology’), practically demanded skills (‘policy sociology’), critical self-reflection (‘critical sociology’) and openness towards multiple publics (‘public sociology’) can our discipline become truly ‘global’. That is why we suggest the principle of ‘integrity’ to be at the core of ‘Global Solidarity Sociology’, implying its harmonious coexistence with the other modes of disciplinary practice.

We believe that the proposed project, in spite of its primary orientation towards non-academic audiences, will not become an obstacle for the development of the other forms of sociological practice, but, on the contrary, will establish strong and mutually beneficial relations with them. In particular, the global translation of solidarity-oriented sociological knowledge to the dominated and the dominating social groups may redefine sociology as not the ‘ideological enemy’ of the upper classes but as an important partner in improving social and economic relations. This could significantly contribute to the perspectives of ‘policy sociology’ in various national and global contexts.

Similarly, global ‘professional sociology’, despite the persisting institutional domination of Europe and the USA, may receive a new source of theoretical and methodological insights through intensification of sociological solidarity communication and constructive dialog all over the globe.

To summarize the present article, the key principles of the proposed ‘Global Solidarity Sociology’ are as follows:

- Openness (orientation towards broad social strata, including the dominated and the dominating groups, instead of any particular narrow audience).
- Solidarity (focus on reducing the tension in social relations instead of conflict-orientation).
- Ethicality (engaging with fundamental ethical foundations instead of political ideology).
- Integrity (orientation towards mutually beneficial interrelations with the other types of sociological practice instead of struggling with them).
- Problem orientation (sensitivity towards the most acute social concerns of the current world instead of self-referential practice).
- Clarity (operating clear and comprehensible concepts, available for a broad audience).

As an example of successful implementation of sociological practice, corresponding to these criteria, we suggest the activities of the prominent sociologist Pitirim Sorokin (Sorokin, 1956; Sorokin and Lunden, 1959) in the American period of his career (see Nichols, 2009, 2012; Sorokin, 2015b). Even though he lived before the current phase of globalization processes, his understanding of the discipline fits all the abovementioned criteria, making him one of the most published sociologists in history, acknowledged in various countries – developed and developing, located in the ‘Global North’ and in the ‘Global South’.

Conclusion

In the present article, we discussed how close current international sociology is to the formation of a truly ‘global’ disciplinary community providing active, open, mutually beneficial and equal interaction between sociologists from different locations, countries and cultures, in their joint efforts to understand, explain and improve the social world. We aimed to reveal the key problems which our discipline faces along this way, and to outline the most promising directions for sociological activity in terms of promoting ‘global sociology’ in the 21st century.

Our study is based on the conceptual scheme proposed by Burawoy (2005), implying four major types of sociological practice: professional, policy, critical and public. The literature analysis demonstrated that ‘professional sociology’, being at the center of the ongoing efforts to construct ‘global sociology’, faces very serious difficulties. We tried to show that these problems originate from not only the inevitable inclination of the hierarchically structured international mainstream towards ‘Eurocentrism’ (Bhabha, 2013, 2014), but also, what might be more important, from the self-referential orientation of academic sociology, leading to an insufficient sensitivity to the real problems of the world. We also demonstrated that ‘policy sociology’ and ‘critical sociology’ in the current conditions can hardly be the leading vehicles of a successful ‘global sociology’ development, especially in the ‘peripheral’ locations.

The achievements of the fourth type of sociological practice, ‘public sociology’, inspired by Michael Burawoy in 2004 (Burawoy, 2005), seem to be the most promising in the global context. The active development of an international dialog between ‘public’ sociologists from various locations, united by shared goals and logic, is a solid confirmation of this. We tried to show that the essential advantages of Burawoy’s project, making it potentially globally successful, are its orientation towards non-academic communities and its focus on the most acute problems of the social world. At the same time, we discussed significant constraints of the global ‘public sociology’, namely, marginality, radicalism, ideological bias and inherent conflict-orientation towards other ‘sociologies’. These features limit the perspectives of ‘public sociology’ in the global arena and hide serious risks for the development of our discipline, as a whole, from the strategic point of view.

Summarizing our study and drawing on John Meyer’s theory of ‘Scientized Environment Supporting Actorhood’ (2010), we propose the project of ‘Global Solidarity Sociology’, which, on the one hand, utilizes the advantages of Michael Burawoy’s ‘public sociology’, and, on the other hand, allows its fundamental limitations to be overcome. The key principles of this project are openness, solidarity, ethicality, integrity, problem orientation and clarity. We hope that implementation of these principles in multiple dialogs between sociologists and their diverse publics in various locations will help to shape a truly ‘global sociology’, improving the interactions of sociologists with the external world, as well as the relations between various disciplinary modes.

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Résumé

Cet article examine plusieurs stratégies en vue de la formation d'une sociologie réellement mondiale, c'est-à-dire active, ouverte, mutuellement avantageuse et basée sur une interaction d'égal à égal entre les sociologues de différents lieux, pays et cultures, dans un effort commun pour comprendre, expliquer et améliorer le monde social. Notre étude se base sur le cadre conceptuel proposé par Burawoy qui met en évidence quatre pratiques disciplinaires distinctes : la sociologie académique, l'expertise sociologique, la sociologie critique et la sociologie publique. La construction d'une sociologie mondiale exige une progression harmonieuse et un enrichissement mutuel qui vont au-delà de ces quatre divisions du travail sociologique, bien que chacune d'entre elles ait sa propre

place sur la scène internationale. L'analyse des documents écrits met en évidence les sérieuses limitations auxquelles fait face la sociologie académique, alors que l'expertise sociologique et la sociologie critique rencontrent des difficultés encore plus grandes. Largement inspirée par Burawoy, la sociologie publique semble plus prometteuse grâce à un certain nombre d'avantages importants : orientation en direction d'un public non universitaire et attention portée aux problèmes sociaux les plus aigus. Cependant, cette pratique disciplinaire fait face à plusieurs défis : marginalisation, radicalisme, biais idéologique et attitude conflictuelle envers les autres sociologies. À partir de la théorie de John Meyer selon laquelle « l'environnement scientifié inspire la condition de l'acteur », nous proposons le projet d'une nouvelle « Sociologie de la solidarité mondiale » qui s'appuierait sur les avancées du projet de Michael Burawoy et qui permettrait de dépasser ses principales limites.

Mots-clés

Sociologie mondiale, sociologie publique, sociologie académique, sociologie internationale, sociologie critique

Resumen

El artículo analiza las perspectivas para la formación de una verdadera “sociología global”, que implica una interacción activa, abierta, de beneficio mutuo y la igualdad entre los sociólogos de diferentes lugares, países y culturas, en sus esfuerzos conjuntos para comprender, explicar y mejorar el mundo social. Nuestro estudio se basa en el esquema conceptual propuesto por Burawoy que destaca cuatro diferentes prácticas disciplinarias: la sociología profesional, la sociología política, la sociología crítica y la sociología pública. La formación de la “sociología global” exige un desarrollo armónico y el enriquecimiento mutuo entre las cuatro “sociologías”, sin embargo, cada una de ellas tiene su propio camino en la arena global. El análisis de la literatura demuestra serias limitaciones en la progresión global de la sociología profesional, mientras que la sociología política y sociología crítica también experimentan grandes dificultades. La sociología pública, en gran parte inspirada por Burawoy, parece ser especialmente prometedora a nivel mundial debido a sus ventajas fundamentales: orientación hacia el público no académico y estar centrada en los problemas sociales más agudos. Sin embargo, en la actualidad, esta práctica disciplinaria tiene varias limitaciones fundamentales: la marginalidad, el radicalismo, el sesgo ideológico y un inherente conflicto de orientación hacia otras sociologías. A partir de la teoría de John Meyer proponemos el proyecto de una nueva “Sociología Global Solidaria”, que utiliza las ventajas del proyecto de Michael Burawoy y permite la superación de sus principales limitaciones.

Palabras clave

Sociología global, sociología pública, sociología profesional, sociología internacional, sociología crítica