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TRENDS IN THE SOCIETAL EVOLUTION?

Summary

The author argues that the rejection of the ideas of the inevitable uni-linear progress of the society should not lead to the rejection of the evolutionary trends altogether. Instead of looking for universal trends he suggests to investigate some of the probable ones, as they can be deduced from the general principles of the systems' and evolutionary theories. The emergence of the complex systems, which are likely to be more adaptable than the less complex ones, becomes more probable in the latter stages of the evolution. In order to survive, however, they need to organize their complexity through differentiation and co-ordination. The higher complexity also requires the upgrading of the unplanned and central forms of co-ordination with the planned and acentral ones. The author notes that these trends are quite widely accepted within several classical and recent sociological theories.

Key Words: Evolution, Social Systems, Complexity, Co-ordination.

Evolutionism in the social theory has often been understood as being associated with the claims that long term social change can be explained as the inevitable progress, leading towards the unlimited growth of morals, happiness, freedom, justice etc. (see Sztompka, 1993; Mattausch, 1999). Being connected to such discredited ideas, social evolutionism was usually rejected together with them. Nowadays it is quite clear that the rejection of the old notion of 'the inevitable progress' does not and should not lead to the rejection of the concept of societal evolution.

In the nineteenth century biological evolutionists could learn something from sociology, when Charles Darwin adopted the concept of 'survival of the fittest' from Herbert Spencer (Peel, 1992, 147-153). Latter, however, several sociological and non-sociological authors have demonstrated that consistent use of Darwinian concepts of variation and selection may be quite productive for sociology (see e.g. Burns/Dietz, 1992; Dawkins, 1978; Luhmann [in Kiss, 1990, 54-56]). These authors have provided clear evidence that there is no need for sociological evolutionism to presuppose any kind of inevitable progress in morality or happiness. What is needed instead is the consistent application of variation and selection to various social and cultural phenomena, such as 'memes', norms, values, roles, groups, organizations, institutions, subsystems or the whole societies.

If, however, the process of evolution was based on blind variations, a question arises, whether one can still speak on *any* kind of trends. May it be argued – as Gould does – that evolution is neither 'a line' (uni-linear), nor 'a tree' (multi-

linear), but a 'bush' (completely coincidental) (see Wilkins, 1997)? If this was correct, the concept of the societal evolution would not have a great explanatory value, but could only describe particular episodes of change when some of the emerging units survive and the others do not, while any kind of prediction potential is lost.

Nevertheless, despite the blindness of variations, certain logic can be found in the processes of selection. From this logic one may still reconstruct certain trends. Though they cannot be taken as universal (since important exceptions can be found), they may be quite useful to understand the societal change in the long run. In this article, four trends in the societal evolution are discussed, namely the growth of complexity, the growth of differentiation and the growth of acentric and planned forms of societal co-ordination. The aim of this article is to argue that – due to the logic of societal evolution – these trends are not necessary but quite probable. Since all the relevant empirical material cannot be gathered and presented within a single article, one should – for now – rely mostly on the deductive reasoning and use empirical evidence mostly as an illustration.

1. Evolution as the growth of complexity

The logic of selection has been formulated by Herbert Spencer as 'the survival of the fittest' or, one may say, of the most adapted to its environment. Needless to say, no unit has the same environment as another one, which means that there is no particular property which would *always* mean that unit A is better adapted than unit B. What 'being adapted' means in terms of concrete characteristics of a unit, depends on the niche to which the unit is adapted. If the concept of adaptation is taken to be the central notion of an evolutionary theory, no trends at all can be explained, because characteristics required for the adaptation would simply depend on a particular niche, to which units are supposed to adapt. Some niches may be better for small units, some for the large ones, some for the complex, some for the simple ones, and so forth.

Adaptation, however, is not the only aspect that matters in survival. No niche is eternal and unchangeable and what was once a perfect adaptation may tomorrow become a perfect non-adaptation and perfect extinction. Consequently, one may also place emphasis on *adaptability* or adaptive capacity – the property of the unit to adapt to different environments (on this difference see also Boulding, 1978, 111-113). This concept has been used in Parsons' theory of evolution, which explicitly claims that modern societies are superior to all other societies not in 'higher morality' or 'happiness', but in their adaptive capacity (Parsons, 1966). They are far from being perfectly *adapted* but they seem to be well *adaptable* through their potentials of control over their environments. Adaptability is a more general feature than adaptation, since it is not directly related to a particular niche, but more to possible changes in niches in general.

It may be assumed that both adaptation and adaptability are important, the former mostly in stable, while the latter mostly in more dynamic environments. Therefore, in the short run the most adapted systems are in advantage, while in the long run, when even the improbable changes become more probable, the most adaptable systems take the lead – if they are, of course, able to survive the possible competition with the most adapted ones in the short run.

Neither adaptation nor adaptability tell one much about the features of the system itself, since they only describe some aspects of its relations to its environments. In order to discuss the characteristics of the systems themselves and the possible trends of their development one should move to some other concepts and try to link them with the logic of the evolution. This logic is based on the variation and selection (according to the adaptation/adaptability of a unit) which take place in the irreversible time.

First, this logic will be linked to system's complexity, which may be defined according to Luhmann as a situation 'when, because of immanent constraints in the elements' connective capacity, it is no longer possible at any moment to connect every element with every other element' (Luhmann, 1995, 24). This means that more than one option is available and the selection between the existing options is required. More complex systems thus deal with more options; they can and they should select some of them and (temporary or permanently) reject the others. Some of the consequences of systems' complexity will be discussed latter, but now we may summarise some of the most important links between the growth of complexity and the evolution. The assumptions discussed here are still so general that they can be applied not only to social but also to psychic systems and organisms.

1. The emergence of a more complex system is more improbable than the emergence of a less complex one, therefore more time is required for the emergence of the former[1].
2. Less complex systems are required as a basis upon which more complex ones can be built.
3. Niches for the less complex systems are filled before the niches for the more complex systems. It may be argued that niches for more complex systems still remain available while more niches for the less complex ones have already been filled (see Boulding, 1978, 115).
4. According to the Ashby's law of requisite variety the system should have the same number of possible options as its environment, i. e. it should be as complex as its environment, in order to be able to control it fully (see Bailey, 1994, 131; Heylighen, 1995; Luhmann, 1995). On the other hand, a system is *always* less complex than its environment and it always suffers from the problem of 'imperfect knowledge' (Heylighen, 1992). This alone would mean an indefinite tendency of any system to increase its

[1] On the relation between evolution and improbability see e. g. Luhmann, 1992

complexity. This is not the case because of the law of requisite constraint, which means that a controlling system should not include *all* options but only those which suit the system's adaptation[2]. However, the balance between the requisite variety and the requisite constraint – which would actually mean the end of growth of complexity – is hardly permanently achieved, because of the co-evolution, namely the evolution of the other systems, which again increases the environmental complexity.

5. A complex controlling system may tend to increase complexity of its environment, which may, according to the law of requisite variety, again require the growth of its own complexity.

Arguments 1 and 2 are related to the question of timing, namely which systems emerge first and which emerge latter, arguments 4 and 5 are related to systems' adaptability/adaptation and argument 3 is related to both. According to 4 and 5 it is quite likely that very complex systems have greater adaptability or adaptive capacity, because they have more options to respond to the challenges of their (changing) environments.

There are, however, at least two general limits in survival capacities of very complex systems:

1. Complexity may also cause greater vulnerability of the system to some changes in the environment, because the relations of a more complex system with its environment depend on a greater number of factors.
2. Though complex systems may have superior general adaptive capacities they may still be less adapted to a *particular* environment than a less complex system, specialised for perfect adaptation to a *particular* environment.

Obviously, these limits should be taken into account and it can be assumed that it is *quite likely, though not necessary*, that societal evolution generally leads towards the growth of societal complexity. Moreover, complexity itself is certainly not enough for better adaptation/adaptability – it does not simply solve problems for the system. Something else is required and this is the organization of complexity through differentiation.

2. Evolution as differentiation

Differentiation, especially the functional one, has often been considered as a major trend in societal evolution – from Spencer (1876-96), Durkheim (1933), Marx (1971, 19ff), and Weber (1978; 1987) to Parsons (1966; 1969; 1977), Habermas (1984; 1987) and Luhmann (1990a; 1990b; 1995).[3] Again, one may accept it as a

[2] On the law of requisite constraint see Joslyn, 1992.

[3] Several authors also emphasise the importance of the opposite process – dedifferentiation (e.g. Rueschemayer [in Sztompka, 1993]; Tiryakian, 1992). Though the cases of dedifferentiation should not be ignored, they also cannot be considered as a general trend. Some common phenomena of modern societies such as integration, inclusion, or co-ordination (even in hierarchical forms) should be clearly distinguished from dedifferentiation. They do not abolish the internal principles of various

very likely trend, which may be inferred from some general principles of both adaptation/adaptability and complexity.

When complexity is defined on the basis of relations between elements, it presupposes certain differentiation, namely the distinction between various elements which may or may not be interconnected. However, differentiation is also a very likely solution of *the problem* of complexity. It has already been mentioned that complexity may be an important asset of the system in its 'struggle' for a proper adaptation/adaptability, since it equips the system with a greater number of options it can use to react to the variety of environmental challenges. On the other hand, according to the law of requisite constraint, the amount of options should be restricted to 'the proper ones', which means that those which function against systems' adaptation/adaptability should be excluded. In the language of Luhmann's systems theory – certain reduction of complexity is required. However, when confronted with extreme number of options from which it may select, a controlling system (no matter whether it functions on the basis of a 'prewritten' *programme* or meaningful *decisions*) may have extreme difficulties when processing all of them and then trying to select the proper ones. Complexity may thus also become a burden and a serious problem.

Differentiation may help to release the system of a part of this burden. When a unit is divided into two units, the latter are *by definition less complex* than the former. Thus, each of the newly differentiated controlling systems has a smaller 'burden' of options to select from, which may suit the law of requisite constraint. There is, however, no necessity that the differentiation by itself contributes to systems adaptation/adaptability: it may even be fatal for the system. Something more may be required and this shall be called co-ordination between the differentiated units. Co-ordination is required because of the *new* level of complexity produced by the differentiation, which causes some new problems of selection.

Consequently, the adaptive value of differentiation may be judged at least from two aspects:

1. How it contributes to the reduction of complexity *in* the newly emerged subsystems, making it easier for them to select from the available options.
2. How it contributes to the co-ordination *between* the newly differentiated subsystems in order to avoid negative consequences for the wider system as a whole.

One may distinguish several types of differentiation from various points of view. However, in order to discuss it in terms of the two criteria mentioned above

subsystems, while dedifferentiation does. The cases of inclusion, such as the universal citizenship rights as described, for instance, by Parsons, are actually based on the *differentiation* (e. g. between politics and economy, since the economic status does not have direct influence on political rights any more) between various societal subsystems (on inclusion see e. g. Parsons, 1969; 1977).

it is useful to distinguish between (1) segmentary differentiation, (2) stratificational differentiation, and (3) functional differentiation.

Before proceeding, these concepts should be briefly clarified.[4] Though they will be discussed mostly from the sociological aspects, they are also applicable to other, non-social, systems, which cannot be discussed here in detail. The concept of segmental divisions has already been used by Durkheim in his discussion on mechanical solidarity (see Durkheim, 1933). It can be defined as a division into relatively similar and relatively self-sufficient (in comparison with functional differentiation) units without hierarchical relations (in comparison with stratificational differentiation) between each other. According to this definition, there is no need to limit, as it is often implicitly done, the segmentary divisions to the units with ascribed membership and even some primordial elements, such as families, ethnic groups, races or nations. Units with 'achieved' membership, such as stock companies or political parties are segmentary differentiated from each other as well.

Stratificational differentiation means *hierarchical* relations between units. It should be clearly distinguished from inequality as such. The sole fact that one unit has more resources than the other is not particularly interesting for a systems theory if it has no consequences for its relations with other units. Of course, some inequalities, such as the status ones, may strongly influence the relations between different segmentary units, but they do not necessary change their segmentary relation into a stratificational one. One may only speak on stratificational differentiation between unit A and unit B when unit A has greater *capacity of control and steering* of the functioning of unit B than B has in relation to A and when each of the two units also has its specific internal logic, which means that each is differentiated from the other and is not a part of it. Consequently, what constitutes the stratificational differentiation is not inequality between units as such, but the *cybernetic* relation between them. This is – at least implicitly – taken into account by the major conflict theories, from Marx to Dahrendorf, which usually tend to stress unequal division of resources. For Marxists, for example, inequalities are only relevant as far as they produce cybernetic relationships, i. e. between the *ruling* and the *ruled* class.

Functional differentiation does not need much further clarification. It may be simply defined as a differentiation into various units which complement each other because each of them perform only a part of the functions required for a certain task (e. g. survival).[5]

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[4] These types of differentiation are also used by Luhmann (1990b, 112) though he does not define them very clearly and mostly limits his discussion to the *functional* differentiation.

[5] All three types of differentiation, especially the segmentary one, are defined here in a very broad way in order to cover as many phenomena as possible. Further classification of each type may be productive, but cannot be discussed here. I discuss this types of differentiation in detail in a manuscript of the article prepared for the special issue of *Journal of Social Sciences* (the journal of Slovene Sociological Association) on Niklas Luhmann, edited by Franc Mali (University of Ljubljana, Slovenia) and Urs Staeheli (University of Bielefeld), which is to be published in autumn 2000.

Obviously these three types of differentiation should only be understood as ideal types. In reality several combinations are possible. For instance, colonialism may produce stratificational relations between segmentary units; segmentary differentiation between political parties may also become a functional one, when one party is in power and the other in opposition; communist regimes created stratificational relations between politics and other functional subsystems of the society,[6] etc. It is also obvious that in almost all societies all types of differentiation coexist.

Segmentary differentiation reduces complexity of the new units simply by reducing their size. Since the emerging units are very similar to each other and since they do not require each other, the co-ordination between them is not very complex. Segmentary differentiation is a prevailing organization of complexity within the relatively less complex systems, such as both simple organisms and simple societies. Though some corrections and sophistication may be required, Spencer's concept of simple society, Durkheim's mechanical solidarity or Parsons' primitive society may still be valid as ideal types of this situation.

Segmentary differentiation, however, has certain inherent disadvantages which make it unable to be the leading organizing principle of the more complex systems:

1. To sustain their self-sufficiency all newly emerged units maintain all of the functions, once hypothetically performed by the wider unit. Despite being smaller in size, each new unit remain equally multifunctional and high complexity cannot be reduced within the unit by transferring some functions to other units.
2. Segmentary differentiation by itself provides no stimulus for integration and leaves all co-ordination to spontaneity. It functions best when units exist in perfect isolation from each other, while in the situation of greater 'material density' (Durkheim, 1933) it may lead to intense competition and/or conflict over the same resources whenever the segmentary units are not controlled by some other principles (e.g. cybernetic steering from some 'higher' unit[7]).

It is therefore no coincidence that only the simplest societies can be based predominantly on segmentary divisions (e.g. between clans). Greater complexity inevitably requires the addition of stratificational elements, namely the establishment of the relations when some units are able to steer other units. Stratificational differentiation has an important advantage over the segmentary one since it is able – by itself – to solve the problem of co-ordination between the differentiated units. Its ability to organize relations between differentiated units makes it suitable for more complex societies, such as the first city states and historic empires characterised by clearer differentiation of political, religious, social and economic

[6] I discuss this in detail in Makarovič, 1996.

[7] In the case of social systems this role may be performed by common cultural patterns, as emphasised by the functionalist tradition of Durkheim and Parsons. In biology the same role may be performed by the common genetic programme.

hierarchies (on this topic see e. g. Parsons, 1966; 1969; 1977; Eisenstadt, 1963 etc.). Obviously, it does not replace segmentary differentiation, which may still exist and grow, but only supplements it.

However, stratificational differentiation also has at least two important drawbacks, which usually become more serious with the even greater complexity:

1. The potential resistance of the steered unit(s) against the steering unit. (This aspect is usually emphasised by Marxism and other conflict theories.)
2. Relatively high complexity is required for the steering unit in order to be able to take into account the complexity of the steered unit and use its actual potentials.

Consequently, the attempts of exclusively hierarchical steering may lead to sub-optimal or even disastrous results. The fall of communist regimes which tended to control the increasingly complex society in a *strictly* hierarchical way may be mentioned as a recent example of adaptive failure of the stratificational principles in very complex situations.[8]

The addition of functional differentiation and even its predominant role may be a solution for the even greater complexity. This type of differentiation appears in the relatively early stages of societal evolution, but becomes of utmost importance in the most complex societies. Its main advantages are (1) the ability to decrease unit's complexity by transfering some of its functions to other units (when compared to segmentary differentiation) and (2) the absence of the unit's need to steer directly the complexity of another differentiated unit (when compared to stratificational differentiation). The adaptation of modern societies to their own complexity is thus mostly based on the functional type of differentiation.

Functional differentiation, nevertheless, is also not able to solve all problems related to complexity. It creates strong interdependence between the differentiated units (contrary to segmentary differentiation) but it does not provide a mechanism for their co-ordination (contrary to stratificational differentiation). Therefore, it requires sophisticated forms of co-ordination between interdependent units. This makes it necessary to discuss not only the evolutionary role of the forms of differentiation, but also the evolutionary role of the forms of co-ordination.

[8] Of course, hierarchical principles remain important in all modern societies, though not as the leading ones. Only the units which are relatively less complex than society as a whole, such as organizations, may remain to be organized in a *predominantly* hierarchical way.

Evolution and co-ordination of society:
towards acentric and towards planned models

The co-ordination of the society[9] may be discussed from several aspects, but only two have been chosen for the purpose of this article: its planning and its centrality. From this simple two-dimensional model four ideal types of societal co-ordination can be derived: unplanned acentric, unplanned central, planned central and planned acentric.

The ability of planning is specific for the meaning based psychic and social systems,[10] which do not set their aims according to a particular programme but according to the constructed meanings. The ability of planning does not place a system which uses it 'above' the evolution, since its sole existence is the result of evolution (i. e. 'blind' variations and selections) and all knowledge used for planning is *ultimately* the result of blind variations, but it may significantly contribute to the system's ability to survive the selection (see Heylighen, 1992). Because of their specific ability of planning our further discussion will be strictly limited to the social systems.

Unplanned acentric model of co-ordination means that there is no central unit, which would – intentionally or unintentionally – regulate the entire system. Individual units may or may not plan their own actions, but no unit can plan for the wider system. Co-ordination of the system is left to the evolutionary spontaneity. This concept may be illustrated by the ideal-typical free market economy or by the full pluralism of various interest groups. Actors only pursue their own aims, but in general, as utilitarians have mostly believed, their actions may have unintentional beneficiary consequences for the system as a whole. This model has limitations. It was already Robert Malthus, for example, who warned that free individual actions are not necessary optimal for the system as a whole. Moreover, in its purest form the unplanned acentric model becomes very similar to the Hobbesian version of 'the state of nature'.[11] It may also be added that if the individual units are capable of planning their own actions they are also very likely to try to change intentionally the system as a whole, destroying its spontaneity.

The most important objection against the belief that the society can be based on the unplanned acentric model, however, was Emile Durkheim's idea of the non-contractual elements of contract. This simply means that neither co-operation nor ordered competition is possible without a certain central basis.

[9] The term 'society' is used here in a classical sense, as a 'political society' defined by E. Durkheim (see. Llobera, 1994, 134)

[10] Because of its emergent properties, psychic system cannot be reduced to a part of an organism, as well as society cannot be reduced to a sum of individuals. (For a logical deduction of the concept of *emergence* from some more elementary axioms of the general systems theory see Heylighen, 1992.)

[11] A classical discussion on the sociological significance of Malthus and Hobbes can be found in Parsons, 1949.

Durkheim's (1933) collective consciousness is a good example of an unplanned central co-ordination. A central body of common values, accepted by the members of the society, co-ordinates the societal system as a whole. Values are normally not planned. Usually they are unintended products of human action, but when created, they are considered as given.

Although one may agree with the functionalists that consensus about certain given central values is necessary for the existence of any society, the unplanned central model also has its limitations. The relative static and centrality of this model often contradict the complex, differentiated, and dynamic nature of modern societies. Therefore Durkheim had to stress the inevitable generalisation of collective consciousness in such societies. But when values are strongly generalised they are no longer able to provide very specific guidelines for human action. Something more is required and this can be the consciously planned central co-ordination.

Despite being the opposites, planned central and unplanned acentric models may well complement each other in a complex modern society. Thus Max Weber (1978) emphasised the rise of both pluralist politics and free market economy as well as the growth of the state bureaucracy with is superior capabilities of planned central co-ordination. A proper combination of both principles seemed to be the best solution for the co-ordination problems of complex modern society.

Durkheim, however, was not satisfied with this combination. He considered the planned central state action as a kind of partial substitute for the weakening direct influence of collective consciousness, but also – similarly to Weber – as a threat to individual freedom. On the other hand – similarly to Karl Marx – he was afraid of the egoism caused by the market economy. Thus, he was looking for a kind of 'the third way' and he found it in the concept of occupational associations, which would go beyond market egoism and state centralism (Durkheim, 1933). This is what can be called the planned acentric model. It means a network of various units, which have a considerable level of autonomy and try to negotiate and achieve common goals, concerning the system as a whole. It also exists empirically in various forms of neo-corporatist arrangements and other negotiation networks.

In order to clarify the relation between co-ordination and differentiation both can be combined in the same table with the examples of the closest theoretical models for each combined type (see Table 1). All of them are, of course, ideal types and in reality only their approximations can be found.

Table 1: The types of co-ordination combined with the types of differentiation

Types of co-ordination➔ / Types of ➓differentiation	Unplanned		Planned	
	Acentric	Central		Acentric
Segmentary	Hobbesian 'state of nature' (co-ordination between units which function only according to their own principles without considering the wider system and without any higher cybernetic control)	Pluralism of associations within Parsons' societal community (co-ordination *between associations* cybernetically controlled by the same cultural pattern)	Co-ordination between regional departments of a bureaucratic government (i. e. *between segmental units* controlled by a central unit which plans for the system as a whole)	consociative democracy (segmental units – e. g. political parties –are trying to built consensus on the steering of the system as a whole)
Stratificational	- (does not exist: acentric co-ordination cannot include stratificational differentiation)	Pluralism of associations within Parsons' societal community (co-ordination *between an association and a cultural pattern* controlling it)	Co-ordination between a bureaucratic department and the central government (co-ordination *between a segmental or functional unit and the central unit* which controls it)	- (does not exist: acentric co-ordination cannot include stratificational differentiation)
Functional	Luhmann's model of self-referential functional subsystems following exclusively their own internal principles	Parsons' AGIL model (functional subsystems cybernetially subordinated to the generalised cultural patterns)	Nazi or communist totalitarianism (all functional sub-systems are subordinated to direct political control)	Willke's 'systems discourse'; neo-corporatist models (negotiations between representatives of various functional units concerning the system as a whole)

Having briefly presented the four ideal types of co-ordination constructed for this purpose, one may try to analyse, whether there are also some specific trends in the prevailing co-ordination models, since greater complexity means greater problems of co-ordination between differentiated units. To avoid further broadening of this analysis the only unit of the social evolution discussed in this section will be *societies*, since the change in prevailing co-ordination models of other types of social systems (e. g. international community) may follow different paths.

Co-ordination of very simple and small archaic societies is mostly based on what was called the unplanned central model. In such societies, the collective consciousness, as Durkheim would argue, is quite strong and its influence is very direct. The law is mostly considered as given and not as a product of intentional human will. Consequently, the predominant forms of co-ordination are unplanned and central.

If the size and complexity of a society grow, more and more planned central elements are required. These processes may be illustrated by the development of first states, such as the historic empires, as described for example by S. Eisenstadt (1963). These processes were also described by Parsons (1966) as clearer differentiation of the political ('goal attainment') subsystem from the rest of society which means that certain units become more clearly specialised for *planning* the co-ordination of the society in a central way. The law in such societies can still be legitimised by a given divine origin, but it becomes more are more clearly intentionally adopted. The emphasis thus moves from the given values to the intentionally adopted positive norms.

But the ability of central control in traditional states (especially in feudalism[12]) is clearly limited, which may leave a considerable room for the elements of unplanned acentric co-ordination. Although the planned central control drastically increases with the rise of absolute monarchies, nation states and their bureaucracies, the new space for unplanned acentric co-ordination opens with the development of market economy and pluralist democracy.

Control potentials of modern states today far surpass the control potentials of the ancient empires. On the other hand, the potentials of the free market to shape the modern world are also becoming more and more significant, especially when linked with the globalisation, which cannot be directly controlled by any individual state. Both hierarchy and market may be inevitable, but they also have clear deficiencies. Planning from a central point may be too rigid, at least because the knowledge is far from being able to include the whole complexity of the system, and may therefore produce sub-optimal solutions. Relying on the unplanned acentric model on the other hand exposes us to great risks: nobody can guess the results for the whole system if 'egoistic' individual units follow only their own plans. Ecological consequences of the free market economy are a well-known example.

These facts have made many authors think about another option which goes beyond the logic of both the hierarchical rigidity and the market egoism. This line of thought, may be tracked from Durhkeim's idea of occupational associations to more recent concepts, like the 'active society' based on communitarianism of Amitai Etzioni (1968; 1993; Tam, 1998), associativism (Hirst, 1994), communicative rationality of Jürgen Habermas (1984; 1987), contextual steering of Helmut Willke

[12] For a classical analysis of feudal society see Bloch, 1961.

(1993; 1995; 1996), or 'The Third Way' of Anthony Giddens (1998).[13] What all these different authors have is common is the belief that planning is extremely important in complex modern societies, but it can no longer be performed from a single centre.

Some of those models, nevertheless, may be questionable. According to Habermas, for instance, the new model of co-ordination can be found especially within the rationalised life-world based on communicative action. Instrumental orders of market economy and state bureaucracy are thus supplemented by an intentional consensus building from the interaction between rational autonomous units. However, such communicative rationality seems to be far too ambitious as a leading principle of steering a modern society. Strict rationality would require, as outlined by Etzioni (1968), (1) information on all alternatives and their consequences, (2) consideration of these consequences in the light of various values and for various types of means, (3) consensus on the values, according to which the consequences are judged and (4) consideration of *all* alternatives. It is quite obvious that it is usually not possible to follow all these requirements, at least because decisions should be adopted in the limited amount of time. An even more radical criticism of Habermas' rational consensus building can be based on Niklas Luhmann's social systems theory, which emphasises the differentiation of society into self-referential sub-systems with their own specific rationalities (see e. g. Luhmann, 1989; 1990a; 1995). Moreover, Luhmann rejected the possibility that any rational planning – central or acentric – can be effective on the macro level in a complex modern society. According to Luhmann planning never includes the entire complexity, but only increases it. All this led Luhmann to a conclusion that one should not rely on planning on a macro level and 'the evolution is all that is needed for survival' (Luhmann, 1995, 477). The practical implication of this conclusion is an incrementalist policy or Lindblom's *muddling through*.

Nevertheless one does not have to accept such a radical scepticism towards planning. Luhmann's theory actually gives us evidence that planning is complicated and limited, but not that it is impossible. A possible solution has been suggested by Etzioni's concept of mixed scanning, which means that the steering of a society comes closer to an ideal of rational planning, when the most important strategic issues are involved, but it approaches incrementalism in everyday issues (see Etzioni, 1968).

Helmut Willke also opposes the idea 'that the evolution is all that is needed for survival', believing that hierarchical planning as well as spontaneous evolution or incrementalism, are sub-optimal. His alternative is based on the idea of intermediary systems. Representatives of various self-referential sub-systems and other units bring their specific knowledge with them and then try to negotiate about the strategic issues of the system as a whole. These negotiations or systemic

[13] These authors can only be briefly mentioned here and the whole complexity of their theories cannot be taken into account.

discourses, as Willke calls them, also involve translations of the rationality of one sub-system to the rationality of another and vice versa. Obviously this is a clear example of planned acentric co-ordination which tries to go beyond both the spontaneity of the market and the hierarchy of the state bureaucracy. A critique of Willke, namely that the openness of the social subsystems required for such steering is not completely consistent with the concept of the relatively closed subsystems inherited from Luhmann, does not contradict the basic emphasis – which is accepted by most of the critics of the Luhmann-Willke concept as well (see e.g. Adam, 1997; Mayntz, 1993; Habermas, 1996) – on the importance of the (planned-acentric) co-ordination between the subsystems of the society.[14]

From combining several theoretical perspectives one may conclude that it is very likely that greater societal complexity requires *the upgrading* – but not replacement – of unplanned and central models of co-ordination with the planned and acentric ones. This does not mean, however, that unplanned and central elements are no longer important – they remain a general basis, upon which one can built the other models. State power still depends on the certain level of legitimacy derived from unplanned central generalised values. Both market and democracy as mostly unplanned acentric models of co-ordination cannot exists at all without a central basis of (unplanned) values and (planned) positive norms. The planned acentric networks for negotiations between various units can exist only within a delicate balance between both the central elements of an effective state and the unplanned acentric pluralism of a variety of autonomous units. Without the former coherent networks are hardly maintained and may dissolve into an unplanned acentric co-ordination; without the later central elements tend to prevail and lead towards undemocratic forms of corporatism (like in fascism and some forms of communist regimes). Therefore a perspective may be seen in the combination of all co-ordination models, though it may be believed that the planned acentric model is the one which has the greatest potential waiting still to be released.

Similar conclusions about gradual upgrading of unplanned and central models with the planned and acentric ones can be drawn from some of the more general principles. The strengths and limits (discussed above) of stratificational differentiation, which is – by definition – present in all forms of central co-ordination, can explain both the evolutionary importance of the models of central co-ordination and their limits in the situations of extreme complexity. Consequently, very complex societies cannot rely on the co-ordination where central principles

[14] The application of the recent theories of regulation to the international and transnational level may provide even stronger evidence for the relevance of the planned acentric co-ordination which goes beyond both anarchy of the free market and the bureaucratic rigidity. The emerging structures of integrated Europe are thus based neither on an uncontrolled spontaneity nor on a new 'super-state' (Mény/Muller/Quermonne, 1996), but on complex policy networks, where steering depends on the combination of knowledge of various national and transnational, governmental and non-governmental, political, economic and expert actors (see Majone, 1996; Mazey/Richardson, 1996; Richardson, 1996). On planned acentric regulation on the transnational level see also Holton, 1998.

completely prevail and the combination with more acentric types is required. Greater extend of planning, on the other hand, can be assumed to be linked not to the earlier but to the later stages of the societal evolution, because of the following:

1. The ability of extensive planning in a social system is more probable when the system has reached certain level of complexity. For instance, limiting options to tradition or 'fate' does not allow much planning.
2. It is more likely (though not always necessary) for the knowledge required for planning to be increasing than to be decreasing, since all knowledge ultimately derives from blind variation and selection (trial and error), which require time.
3. The ability of planning is more needed in very complex social systems to avoid the selection of the increasingly high number of options that are becoming possible but extremely risky or even fatal for the wider system if selected. Complex interdependencies within – mostly – functionally differentiated social systems make it impossible to allow completely blind variations without causing irrecoverable damage for the wider social system.

Again, the necessity of upgrading of unplanned and central with planned and acentric can be confirmed.

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The reasoning used in this analysis has been mostly deductive, supported by some general principles of evolutionary and systems theory as well as by some sociological theories. To draw completely reliable conclusions on the actual trends of social evolution, extensive empirical evidence would also be required. However, it can be concluded that it is clearly premature to claim that long-term social change does not include any relevant trends, though these trends are not a necessity, but a likely option, especially in the environment that requires a high level of adaptability.

Where a high level of adaptability is required, there is also a greater probability of more complex systems to survive the selection, because of the ability of such systems to choose between a relatively greater number of options. The strengths of the complex systems in the evolutionary selection can be explained, among others, by the Ashby's law of requisite variety. The trend towards differentiation, especially the functional one, can be inferred from the growth of complexity, since the differentiation is both the cause of complexity and the way of organizing complexity. Although differentiation reduces complexity within the new individual units, which emerge through differentiation, it produces complex relations between the new units. The later require certain forms of co-ordination that may be classified in terms of centrality and planning. The growing complexity

of societies requires the upgrading – not replacing – of the basic unplanned and central forms of co-ordination with both planned and acentric ones.

No long term trends of social change are an inevitable necessity, but some directions of change still seem to be much more likely than the other are.

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Матеј Макарович

Трендови у социјалној еволуцији

Резиме

Аутор доказује да одбацивање идеја о неизбежном унилинарном прогресу друштва не треба да води одбацивању еволуционих трендова уопште. Уместо трагања за универзалним трендовима, он сугерише да треба истраживати неке од могућих трендова који се могу извести из општих принципа теорија система и еволуционистичких теорија. Појава комплексних система, који су вероватно прилагодљивији од мање комплексних, вероватнија је на каснијим стадијумима еволуције. Да би опстали, међутим, они морају да организују своју комплексност кроз диференцијацију и координацију. Већа комплекосност такође захтева да се непланирание и средишњие облици координације побољшају планираним и несредишњим. Аутор запажа да су ови трендови врло прихваћени у неколико класичних и нових социолошких теорија.

Кључне речи: еволуција, социјални системи, комплексност, координација.