СРАБОЧЕГО СТОЛА
СОЦИОЛОГА

FROM THE WORKING TABLE
OF A SOCIOLOGIST

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КОНЦЕПТУАЛИЗАЦИЯ СТРАТЕГИЙ ВОСПРОИЗВОДСТВА
И АДАПТАЦИЙ В КОНСТРУКТИВИСТСКОЙ ПЕРСПЕКТИВЕ

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Обсуждается проблема поиска новых подходов в концептуализации адаптивных стратегий. Утверждается, что для основных подходов в социологии адаптаций характерны два вида редукционизма: первый вид связан с приоритетом объективных структур над субъектом, а второй – с приоритетом субъекта над объективными структурами. Предложена новая концептуальная схема стратегий социальных агентов по воспроизводству поля и адаптации в нем посредством теоретического ресурса языка структуралистского конструктивизма П. Бурдье. Продемонстрирована взаимосвязь таких ключевых категорий, как структура, поле, габитус, illusio и doxa в концептуализации различных стратегий агентов с их последующей типологизацией. Подчеркивается, что этот шаг позволяет избежать двух обозначенных полюсов в социологической концептуализации адаптаций и произвести более релевантную операционализацию стратегий воспроизводства и адаптации, применимую для эмпирического исследования.

Ключевые слова: адаптивные стратегии; социология адаптаций; воспроизводство; структуралистский конструктивизм; П. Бурдье.

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CONCEPTUALISATION OF REPRODUCTION AND ADAPTIVE STRATEGIES IN THE CONSTRUCTIVIST PERSPECTIVE

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The article highlights the relevance of finding new approaches in the conceptualisation of adaptive strategies. It is argued that the main approaches that have developed in the sociology of adaptations are characterised by two types of reductionism: one of them is associated with the primacy of objective structures over the subject, and the other with the primacy of the subject over objective structures. The article proposes a new conceptual scheme of social agents’ strategies for the reproduction of the field and adaptation in it through the theoretical resource of the language of P. Bourdieu’s structuralist constructivism. For this purpose the authors demonstrate the interrelation of such key categories as «structure», «field», «habitus», «illusio» and «doxa» in the conceptualisation of various strategies of agents with their typologisation. This step, according to the authors, gives the opportunity to avoid the two designated poles in the sociological conceptualisation of adaptations and to provide higher relevance of operationalisation of reproduction and adaptation strategies applicable for empirical research.

Keywords: adaptive strategies; sociology of adaptations; reproduction; structuralist constructivism; P. Bourdieu.

Introduction

The problem of adaptation is one of the fundamental problems in sociology with an extremely broad interdisciplinarity status. In sociology, research interest in adaptation can be detected at the earliest stages of its institutionalisation as a science. In general, for quite a long time, the conceptualisation of adaptation was carried out on two main scales: at the macro-level of social systems and the micro-level of individuals. However, in both cases, the sociological categories, which were called upon to make the transition to empirical verification with the particularity of the discipline, turned out to be either philosophical (for example, T. Parsons) or psychological (for example, F. Znaniecki and W. I. Thomas) in content. The new theories that appeared around the 1970s and set themselves the task of integrating the problems of structure and action gave more promise and hope to solve the designated problem.

P. Bourdieu’s constructivist theory occupies a special place among them: in his works, he managed to identify the problem of reproduction and variability not only of structure but also of agents. At the same time, the problems proposed by the French sociologist are distinguished by original analytical steps that assume the synthesis of the mutual influence of structure and agents with an emphasis on the former. However, although P. Bourdieu offered a broad perspective for the study of stability and variability, in his works he did not focus specifically on the problem of adaptation, leaving it in the background of the concept of habitus, which reduces the agent’s behaviour to the influence of historical structure.

In his work «Reproduction strategies and modes of domination» [1] P. Bourdieu gives an understanding of the internal dynamism of the social world endowed with the «desire» to remain in its existence. This aspiration is conatus, formed and maintained by objective and subjective structures (dispositions of agents). Moreover, the actions taken by the social agent to construct and reconstruct them mainly depend on the positions in the structure of the distribution of capital and the mechanisms that ensure their reproduction.

P. Bourdieu notes the role of «subjective structures» in the form of dispositions of agents regarding the reproduction of structures and makes an attempt to abandon the arrogant view «from afar» characteristic of structuralism, which is expressed in referring to the concept of strategy and «approximation» to practice itself. However, it is impossible to find proper conceptual content in his approach, which allows moving from theoretical foundations to applied research practice. In particular, the question remains how, through the theoretical resource of the language of structuralist constructivism, it is possible to investigate the problems of adaptive behaviour of agents in specific fields, the autonomy of which is always relative.

In order to be able to explicitly apply the theoretical language of P. Bourdieu, which can bring us closer to the point of view of a social agent, as well as to make a relevant operationalisation of the concept of strategies, it is necessary to go beyond the discussions about matrimonial strategies or inheritance strategies, as well as about strategies of symbolic or economic and other types of investment. At the same time, in order to avoid the other pole of conceptualisation, which reduces the agent’s behaviour to subjective rationalisation, we should refer to concepts of illusio, doxa and habitus, that describe the bases of social behaviour as which are not obscured by reflection.

It is worth noting that P. Bourdieu himself did not set himself such tasks, but sought to present only theoretical positions based on the results of a series of specific historical studies, which can be called ethnological rather than sociological. In this regard, this work pursues an attempt to conceptualise adaptive strategies on the indicated grounds.
Social structure, capitals and fields

Within the framework of his theoretical optics, P. Bourdieu proposes to consider social reality as a multidimensional social space, which the French sociologist differentiates into several social «sub-worlds» with their own logic and features of functioning, which he denotes by the concept of a field. The most fundamental level of social space is the level of social classes. P. Bourdieu distinguishes three types of classes: the dominant, the dominated, and the petty bourgeoisie, which occupies an intermediate position between them. The first includes groups of agents with the largest amount of economic and cultural capital, the second – groups of agents with the smallest amounts of both economic and cultural capital, and the third – groups of agents whose volume of various types of capital has average values.

The level of social classes, in turn, determines the structure of the field of power in various social fields, which are relatively autonomous spheres of human activity with special rules for the functioning of institutions and relations between agents. According to P. Bourdieu, the field of power is «the space of power relations between agents and institutions that have the capital necessary to take dominant positions in various fields (in particular, economic and cultural)» [2, p. 369].

Exactly in this field, there is a struggle between agents with different types of capital for establishing rules for determining the value of certain types of capital, their preservation and transformation, i.e. for determining the foundations of power.

Ultimately, the structure of social space at different levels is determined by the distribution of capital. The concept of capital was borrowed by P. Bourdieu from the economic theory. Despite this fact, however, his concept of capital has different explanatory logic for the analysis of social processes and phenomena. P. Bourdieu starts developing the concept of capital from the thesis that the social world is accumulated history; it is not a discontinuous series of instantaneous mechanical equilibria between agents, that can be treated as interchangeable particles. «Capital, writes P. Bourdieu, is accumulated labour (in its materialised form or its 'incorporated', embodied form) which, when appropriated on a private, i.e., exclusive, basis by agents or groups of agents, enables them to appropriate social energy in the form of reified or living labour. It is a vis insita, a force inscribed in objective or subjective structures, but it is also a lex insita, the principle underlying the immanent regularities of the social world» [3, p. 241].

A simial thesis about the cost of capital is proposed by the labour theory of value, according to which «capital includes accumulated materialised and living labour» [4, p. 60]. However, bypassing this similarity with economic theory, P. Bourdieu’s logic enters the plane of criticism of its postulates.

In his opinion, economism is aware of only one kind of interest, which was developed by capitalism itself as a result of the creation of a world the exchange relation of which are based on «cold monetary reckoning» [5, p. 221]. From his point of view, economism uses the methods and concepts which are historical products of capitalism. This fact leads to the transformation of the object of study itself, thus, economism is unable to take into account «non-economic» interests and explain societies or social fields that have, in the words of P. Bourdieu, «an economy in itself but not for itself» [5, p. 221]. Pointing out this drawback, he outlines the boundaries of the general science of economic practices, focused on the study of capital incorporated in various forms in the structures of the social world, not just capital in a form identified and socially recognised as «economic» capital, which is expressed in money and property rights.

In addition to economic capital, the researcher also suggests distinguishing such forms of capital as cultural capital and social capital, the transfiguration of which generates the fourth type – symbolic capital, which is associated with recognition and which acts «as a legitimate competence, in the form of a force influencing recognition (or non-recognition)» [4, p. 62]. The possession of symbolic capital allows its owners to set the boundaries of legitimate norms and cultural patterns in the broadest sense.

Thus, capital in its most general form is resources that can take both tangible visible forms and intangible ones. It also has the potential to produce profit and reproduce itself in identical or expanded forms, but it takes time to accumulate and it tends to persist [3, p. 241]. The distribution of various types of capital determines the structure of the social world and, through the establishment of restrictions, determines the chances of success of particular practices of agents in certain fields. In addition, the volume and structure of capital are social conditions [1, p. 104] in which the habitus of agents is formed.

Habitus and duality of argumentation

The concept of habitus is the key one in explaining the problem of social order. It allows the French sociologist to mediate the interaction of «objective structures» and «subjective agents». Habitus, according to P. Bourdieu, is a system of stable and portable dispositions acting as principles that generate and organise practices and representations [6, p. 45].

The formation of habitus occurs in the context of the agent’s long-term social experience, which is «inscribed» in the structure of social space. The greatest influence on this process is exerted by the first experience, which is acquired in family relationships and underlies the schemes of perception and evaluation of any subsequent experience. In each typical situation, these schemes allow the
agent to build a sequence of actions on a pre-reflexive basis without understanding the rules and evaluating the results of these actions. In turn, the action of habitus, detected outside the acquired experience, is systematic; however, this property does not reduce the action of habitus to the action of custom [7, p. 138].

Here, we should remind that the main idea of this article affirms the relevance of conceptualisation, which includes not only opus operantum, but also modus operandi, i.e. not only objectified, but also incorporated products of practical history.

While reconstructing the position of P. Bourdieu regarding the practices and strategies of reproduction, as well as his theoretical logic, we can detect his desire, firstly, to «homogenise» the principle of double structuring, and, secondly, to avoid the separation of concepts from the reality of research, which stems from formalisation. However, we also can find quite specific theoretical and methodological foundations of structuralism and constructivism, to which the author refers in every attempt to explicitly read the structuring and structured mechanisms of reproduction.

Such logic, which combines the inductive approach of social constructivism with deductive schemes of structuralism, allows us to fully cover the specifics of the course of social practices, their predetermination by social structures, and the reconstructive meaning of habitus. Therefore, remaining consistent with this logic, the proposed conceptualisation will be presented in two parts, one of which is devoted to strategies of field’s order reproduction, and the other to adaptive strategies in the field.

Field reproduction strategies

The structuralist side of the argument refers us to conatus (aspiration) as immanently inherent in the field of the distribution of capital and the mechanisms of its reproduction, which is incorporated in the form of dispositions but at the same time objectified to the greatest extent.

While considering practices from the side of conatus, capital dispositions acquire primary importance in the design of the most basic and long-term reproduction strategies. And the longer these strategies are in time, the less they can be fixed, remaining for the observer (researcher) rather an agent’s «inclination» to a certain type of reproduction (fig. 1).

We can see a similar scheme describing the distribution of respondents’ taste preferences depending on the dispositions of cash capital in the work «Distinction: a social critique of the judgement of taste» [8]. In this work, P. Bourdieu on the basis of a study based on empirical data collected in several stages by survey methods and ethnographic observation, topologises the social space of France in the 1960s. In particular, it presents the distribution of political preferences: the respondents’ willingness to vote in elections for certain political initiatives directly depended on their positions, determined by the structure of the distribution of capital. Those who possessed a large amount of capital (mainly economic) acted as conservatives on the French political scene, giving preference to the right. Thus, they advocated the preservation of the structure and logic of the reproduction of the field, which ensured their place in the hierarchy. Those respondents who had a smaller amount of economic capital and a large amount of cultural capital (which is least amenable to objectification and inheritance) tended to vote for the left in an attempt to influence the mechanisms of reproduction and distribution of capital.

We follow the same logic, reducing the influence of a position in a social structure to the strategy of an agent or to the conatus of reproduction of the field. The difference is only in reducing it to the fundamental desire of habitus to reproduce the conditions of its own production. In fact, habitus seeks to reproduce itself in accordance with its internal logic, asserting its autonomy in relation to the situation.

Agents, who have achieved or inherited a relatively high position in the vertical hierarchy and at the same time have a large amount of capital (primarily economic), seek to legitimise the old way of reproduction, which ensured their place in the hierarchy. They are aimed at transforming doxa (the perception of the existing order of things as something taken for granted) into orthodoxy. Such agents can be represented as an «interpreter» – an employee of an organisation who is remunerated in accordance with the position that he occupies and which he is responsible for. In this case, the «organisation» is the organisation of the social order, the system of capital distribution and its reproduction. Conatus «interpreter» opposes «entrepreneur». It is another type of an agent who is not endowed with a proper amount of objectified capital (without taking into account objectified forms of cultural capital) and probably experiencing problems converting available forms of
capital into economic or political capital. Their conatus is embodied in the desire to rationalise (in the dual sense of the word) conversion, accelerating the awareness of transformations and the development of suitable strategies, thus legitimising these strategies in the eyes of «conservatives».

**Habitus and adaptive strategies**

A close reading of Bourdieu’s works gives us an opportunity to find that habitus manifests itself most vividly to an outside observer when a social agent is forced to act in circumstances unusual for them. In other words, we can observe the effect of habitus when its incorporated structures are irrelevant to the objective structures of the existing social environment.

At the same time, according to the principle of double structuring, a social agent moves not only obsequiously, reproducing seemingly self-evident social structures, but also actively transforms them. It also means that an agent is faced with a constantly changing social reality, the changes of which are not the work of their own hands.

In childhood, we actively master the principles of acting in the complex world of social relations. These lessons taught to us by parents, teachers and institutions remain with us forever, and form the basis of those incorporated structures that make up part of the social world. However, with age, this ability to internalise, which in Bourdieu’s sociology is inextricably linked with Piaget’s developmental psychology [9], weakens, and it gives the way to the reproduction of incorporated strategies of compliance with the requirements of cooptation.

We can conditionally reduce all the variety of practical manifestations of the implementation of these strategies to three main types: active, passive and frustrated. Social agents, finding themselves in a permanent challenge to the possibilities of realising their goals (here the concept of goals is close to conatus) in priority areas of public life have many possible reactions that habitus builds into an adaptive strategy:

- active intervention in external circumstances, when agents seek to bring «objective reality» to an incorporated state, i.e. to the form in which the habitus was formed, thus solving the problem of relevance and increasing the chances of success;
- acceptance of external circumstances as primacy over the possibilities for the realisation of one’s goals and the desire to bring incorporated structures reproduced in practices to the requirements of the field;
- frustration caused by the inability to realise goals in view of habitus hysteresis, i.e. the irrelevance of incorporated structures to objective structures. Frustration can be expressed in marginalisation, rejection of goals, or a change of priorities in a situation when, unable to act in a more important field (in accordance with doxa), an agent changes the scope of activity, moving down the hierarchy of finite areas of values.

To fully understand this part of the conceptualisation, it is necessary to clarify a few basic points about what a «strategy» actually is in the context of adaptability.

The main advantage of the concept of strategy in the sense used by P. Bourdieu is that, unlike some forms of methodological individualism, it takes into account the structural constraints that affect agents, and at the same time, unlike some mechanistic versions of structuralism, suggests the possibility of active response to these pressures.

In terms of the metaphor of the game, these constraints are basically inscribed in the various forms of capital available or in the position occupied by some unit in the distribution structure of this capital, i.e. in the relation of forces between agents. In contrast to the common use of this concept, when strategies mean the conscious and long-term intentions of an individual agent, P. Bourdieu refers to it to designate various sets of actions ordered in accordance with more or less long-term and not necessarily explicitly formulated goals [8], that is, with the intention of the benefits that this or that activity should bring. It is the way in which habitus selects and arranges the actions of an agent according to the goals pursued by him in the changing scene of social relations and structural constraints expressed in the logic of successive games that we call adaptive strategies.

At the same time, P. Bourdieu does not interpret «benefit» as a purely utilitarian concept in the spirit of rational choice theory. In order to avoid vulgar materialism in the concept of benefit, he suggests replacing it with the term «illusio» [10, p. 66–67]. According to this interpretation, the benefit is the belief that some social activity is significant enough to engage in it. Thus, any benefit is only an «illusio» – a belief in the significance of the goal, which was internalised by the agent in the process of socialisation. This belief is especially strong among the so-called «natives» of the field, that is, for those agents, whose habitus is homogeneous to the environment and is most relevant for success in this field [11].

For each field, there are specific types of illusio, which vary significantly, and they cannot be reduced to each other. Accordingly, there are as many types of benefits as there are social fields: each field offers agents a specific goal. For example, the benefits pursued by politicians usually do not coincide with the benefits of businessmen: the former attach importance to power as the goal of their activities, while for the latter the main motive is the multiplication of another type of capital – the economic one. It is worth noting, however, the utilitarianism of the logic of the economic field and its desire for intervention, subjugation of the logic of
games in other social fields such as art, science, politics, etc.

Bourdieu’s use of the concept of illusio allows avoiding the straightforward objectivist schemes in determining the motives of the subject’s behaviour. A close examination of the relationship of a social agent’s belief in the significance of any activity to the field in which this activity unfolds and enters into relations with the intentions of the benefit of other players requires an appeal to the constructivist origins of Bourdieu’s sociology, up to the descriptive phenomenology of A. Schutz and the sociology of knowledge of P. Berger and T. Luckmann. Therefore, we will confine ourselves to a few remarks that may be sufficient to clarify our position.

The logic of the «goal» is utilitarian. This concept refers us to the logic of the field as an intersubjectively constituted space of struggle between the positions of the hierarchy and the dispositions of capital common in it. It is possible to represent the agent’s motivation in this way only by reducing the behaviour of the subject in everyday life to pure conatus. This assumption leaves no room for the subjectivism inherent in the social agent as a representative of the human race.

Although illusio, being a product of internalisation, relates to habitus, it entirely belongs to the subject. Illusio can be adequate to the field, which implies in the possibility of achieving the intended benefits, i.e. the ability to succeed in a particular activity. However, illusio’s relation to the field is always affected by the «relevance problem» [12], and cannot fully correspond to the «interests of the field» – the logic of games, which is a product of collective social history (fig. 2).

This is a balance which is born in the relentless struggle for compliance with the norms of cooptation of particular environment or institutions. The struggling agents are not aware of this fact. The adequacy of the relevance of the agent’s intentions stems from the social nature of their origin. Inadequacy results from the hysteresis (lag) of incorporated structures, or their origin, which differ significantly from the field of implementation. A classic example is Don Quixote. As a result of the irrelevance of habitus, he reproduces social relations that do not exist in the present reality, which makes him a comical character who was possessed by the spirit of medieval romanticism. In real life, one can often meet people whose habitus and the systems of dispositions reproduced in practice no longer correspond to the reality of vital relationships, which can lead to frustration of an agent unable to realise himself in new conditions.

Another important concept for understanding the theoretical and methodological foundations of the conceptualisation of adaptive strategies is doxa. First mentioned by Aristotle, the concept of doxa (from ancient Greek – «common opinion, idea») has undergone many interpretations, and revived mainly by postmodern discourse. Today it is loaded no less than notions of «strategy» or «adaptation». However, it is important for our analysis for the following reason. In the Bourdieu’s theoretical language it represents not only a fundamental agreement with the world, but also pre-reflexive judgments about the hierarchy of finite provinces of meaning (in Schutz’ sense) which reflects, according to the constructivist logic, the agent’s ideas about social fields and subfields (fig. 3). Accordingly, doxa embodies a universal logic of hierarchisation of social fields and all games available for participation.

Thus, the businessman’s doxa suggests that games available for participation where economic capital is the main bet and benefit are more preferable than games that are a field of struggle for political or symbolic capital. For a scientist (if he is a genuine scientist), it is a matter of course that the discursive field of science is above politics and all kinds of populism, acting as games proposed for participation in it. This does not negate his belief (illusio) in the importance of political activism, especially if he is involved in it, but it only defines the priority of one illusio (the importance of scientific activity) over another one.
Conclusion

In this article, we have tried to conceptualise the strategies of the reproduction of the field and adaptation in it through the theoretical resource of the language of Bourdieu’s structurist constructivism. It should be noted that this attempt was oriented by the desire to avoid two radical poles in the sociological conceptualisation of adaptation that developed at the earliest stages of the institutionalisation of sociology: the primacy of objective structures over the subject and vice versa. In order to achieve this goal, we have to reconstruct the logic of argumentation of the interaction of objective structures and incorporated subjective structures, which can be found in the concepts of habitus, illusio and doxa developed by Bourdieu. This let us to define the basis of the mechanisms of compliance with the requirements of cooptation which can be reflected in the form of strategies of reproduction of the field and adaptation to it.

As a result of conceptualisation, we identified several types of strategies of reproduction and adaptation. In the first case, it is possible to distinguish «interpreter» as a strategy focused on the preservation and reproduction of the social order, and «entrepreneur» as a strategy aimed at its transformation. In the second case, active, passive and frustrating adaptive strategies can be distinguished. Active strategies are characterised by the agent’s intervention in external circumstances, passive strategies are characterised by the agent’s acceptance of external circumstances, and frustrating strategies are characterised by the agent’s change of priorities and goals within the existing social field up to the «exit» from it. The differences in these strategies are based on the differences in the positions of agents which depend on the structure of the distribution of various types of capital, the mechanisms of reproduction of this structure, as well as the degree of relevance of the incorporated structures of the agent to the objective structures of the field in which the agent operates.

This conceptualisation allows us to move on to the next stage of the study of reproduction strategies and adaptations of social agents, which implies in their operationalisation as mechanisms of compliance with the requirements of cooptation. This conceptualisation, however, requires further clarification and verification, which can be implemented in particular empirical studies.

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