

# THEORETICAL - METHODOLOGICAL BASIS FOR THE SOCIOLOGICAL STUDY OF THE CITY

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**Abstract:** The paper presents the basic theoretical and methodological assumptions for the sociological study of the city. The great acceleration of all social flows, new forms of social life, the emergence of entire value systems that were not developed until yesterday, the increasing regional differentiation, on the one hand, globalization, on the other hand, have made it very difficult to talk about patterns that could be universal. As the number of inhabitants in cities continues to grow in all areas, there is no doubt that these are precisely the areas where the greatest number of changes occurring in society are “recorded”. If the phrase that “the city is a direct imprint of society in space” once represented the best definition and simultaneously described the city itself, today it can be said that the city has become synonymous with society itself. The occupations of urban sociology researchers can be divided into three large groups of urban problems. First, on the one hand, there is a large (western) city in which the social changes of the world, with more and more attributes of postmodernity, are daily faced with: high population density, the inability to solve communal and organizational problems of dynamic everyday life, crime and other forms of insecurity on the city’s asphalt, threatening ecological cataclysms, alienation, consumerist lifestyle, etc. 2. On the other side are cities in underdeveloped parts of the world, where some of the problems of Western cities are multiplied or have different, often more pronounced manifestations. It is possible to record a kind of urban and social chaos, with little new, but intensified forms of old manifestations, such as: class and / or racial segregation, spatial differentiation, diseases, lack of basic communal infrastructure in many parts of the city, illegal settlements inhabited by the poor population, with a substandard quality of life, crime, etc. 3. On the third side, there are cities and societies in “transition” in which the collapse of the social systems within which they shaped their reality in recent decades suddenly occurred. Although we are mostly talking about the countries of yesterday’s political east of Europe, we must not lose sight of the fact that a large part of the underdeveloped world at the global level is in immediate social transition. Be that as it may, the feature or group of problems that occupy these urban environments pervades the first two groups of problems (that is, Western cities and cities in underdeveloped parts of the world), along with some specific features characteristic of cities in countries in transition, namely: disruption of social relations, as a side effect of the collapse of the value system built for many years. Accelerated and dramatic social stratification, where the closeness of people, especially in urban areas, is sociologically “read” as a new phenomenon. The author’s intention is to introduce the reader to modern theoretical and methodological bases for the study of the problems of urban sociology. The text consists of several parts. In the first part, marked as Introduction, the author will present the basic ideas that he considers further in the paper. In the second part, we will present a brief overview of the most important sociological definitions of the city, moving chronologically, from the origin of this scientific discipline to its contemporary understandings. The third part presents the most important theoretical and methodological assumptions in the sociological study of the city. The fourth part will be a sublimation of everything mentioned above and will represent a certain type of concluding considerations. In the fifth part of the paper, we will present a detailed list of the literature used.

**Keywords:** city sociology, city, city definitions, theory, methodology.

**Field:** Social sciences; Sociology; Urban sociology.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

At the very beginning, we must ask a rhetorical question. Namely, is the city really a society on a reduced scale, that is, an imprint of society in space, as many theoreticians of urban sociology point out? According to S. Šljukić, “all human societies, both those of the past and those existing today, had and have similar needs and therefore engaged in solving similar problems. In their effort to maintain and reproduce, they created a large number of institutions, which, over time, acquired more permanent forms, passed on from generation to generation. Hence, it is not surprising that there are social institutions that are of a universal character, i.e. those that we can find in all (or almost all) human societies.

One of these universal institutions is settlement, in fact more permanent staying in one place and the creation of settlements, of different shapes, sizes and structures, which have proven to be functional when it comes to the most important task of every human society: to ensure the conditions for its own survival” (Šljukić, 2015: 61). Therefore, [...] the city emerges as a center of social power, both political,

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economic and cultural. With the appearance of the city, the settlements in its surroundings, closer and further, significantly different from it in various ways, are seen as villages. That's why the village and the city should be seen as mutually determining phenomena - only when a city is created, with its special features, can we talk about the village as a specific form of settlement [...]” (Šljukić, 2015: 63).

## 2. THEORETICAL BASIS FOR THE SOCIOLOGICAL STUDY OF THE CITY – DEFINITIONS AND TYPOLOGY OF URBAN SETTLEMENTS

The views expressed above logically lead us to the definition of the term itself - city. According to S. Vujović, “a city is a permanent, large, densely populated residence of socially heterogeneous individuals in which the majority of residents are engaged in non-agricultural activities. In other words, a city is a differentiated set of population, activities and institutions concentrated in the same territory” (Vujović, 2010: 121). The same author points out that, “when it comes to the city, it is necessary to take into account temporality, because history and time are contained in the city” (Vujović, 2010: 123). A. Lefebvre gives the following definition of the city: “the city is a spatial object that occupies one terrain and a specific position and should be studied as an object using different techniques and methods: economic, political, demographic, etc. As such, the city occupies a specific space, which is very different from the rural space. The relationship between these spaces depends on production relations, that is, the way of production, and, through it, on the division of labor within society” (Vujović, 2010: 166 - 167).

On the other hand, M. Castells (2018), as a continuation of Marxist and partly Weberian theory, states that “the old axiom of urban sociology starts from the fact that space is a reflection of society. Life and cities, however, are too complex to be captured by axioms. The close connection between space and society, cities and history is therefore more a matter of expression than of reflection. The social matrix is expressed in spatial models through the dialectical interaction of social contradictions and conflicts (Tonovski, 2023), as conflicting trends in endless space” (Vujović, Petrović, 2005: 181). However, as carefully concluded by A. Giddens “the nature of the environment created in this way is not only the result of the activities of rich and powerful people.” Castells (2018) emphasizes the importance of the struggle of less privileged groups to change the conditions in which they live. Urban problems encourage a whole series of social movements that deal with the improvement of living conditions, the problem of air pollution, the defense of parks and green areas, and the fight against construction, which changes the nature and appearance of some part of the city [...] In other words, the struggle of the rich and powerful on the one hand, and various types of social movements on the other” (Giddens, 2003: 590).

On the contrary, almost completely rejecting the morphological, geographic, demographic, and economic role in the functioning of the city of L. Wirth, in the first place, emphasizes its cultural character. He believes that: the characteristic of the way of life of man in the modern age is concentration in huge collectivities, around which smaller groups grow, from which ideas and activities radiate, in other words, civilization. And then, the degree of urbanity of modern society cannot be completely and accurately determined by the proportion of the entire population living in cities (Skler, 2023). In this sense, the influence that cities have on the social life of a person is greater than the size of the city population suggests. In this way, the city is not only the residence and workshop of modern man, but also the center of initiative and the center of control of economic, political and cultural life, which attracted the most distant parts of the world to itself, and wove various areas, people and activities into one world (Wirt, 1963, according to: Vujović, Petrović, 2005: 111).

Finally, L. Wirth gives us a short but comprehensive definition of the city - “[...] a relatively large, densely populated and permanent residence of socially heterogeneous individuals” (Vujović, Petrović, 2005: 116), and suggests that the main problem of urban sociology is “to discover the forms of social action and organizations that usually occur in a fairly stable, compact settlement made up of a large number of heterogeneous individuals” (Vujović, Petrović, 2005: 116). Thus, throughout history, the city changed its forms as well as its political, economic and cultural content. According to T. Stojanović, “growing over the centuries and finally stretching across the horizon, and in some societies reaching up to the sky, cities developed in different rhythms, experienced many different destinies and acquired different forms” (Stojanović, 1992, Vujović, 2010: 121). Accordingly, it is possible, in this place, to offer, according to the author, a sufficiently developed typology of cities. In this way, cities could be classified, according to different criteria, into: open cities, fortified cities, trading cities, administrative headquarters, monster cities, mother cities, satellite cities, self-governing urban communities, dependent cities, suburbs, stopover cities, urban centers of production, urban centers of consumption (Stojanović, 1992; Pušić, 2010; Vujović, 2010).

### 3. METHODOLOGICAL BASIS FOR THE SOCIOLOGICAL STUDY OF THE CITY

It is important to point out that sociological research of the city as a specific social phenomenon implies the use of all available sociological, and not only sociological, methods, techniques and instruments. For example, the historical method, the method of content analysis and hermeneutics, observation, survey research, interview method, archival materials, focus groups, case method, and others (Blankar, 2023). However, we believe that the use of the historical method exhaustively explains the urban space and its phenomena, because it contains almost all of the previously mentioned methods, techniques and instruments (Aziz, 2020; Brill, 2022).

S. Vujović recommends that when researching any urban environment, the researcher must keep in mind the following characteristics: the past of the city, the reasons for its establishment, its development and sometimes its splendor, the dominant spatial and functional structures. But also the future, which is expressed by its social dynamism, its geographical features and development projects determined by the regional and central authorities, or the international factor. From this, it can be concluded that the urban phenomenon needs to be approached historically (Vujović, 2010: 123). First, "the historical method includes various types of documents of a primary or secondary character, which include biographies, autobiographies, interviews, various types of statistical data, for example censuses, then descriptions of historical events seen through the eyes of its actors, or created indirectly based on testimony the actors themselves, etc. In this way, with a good knowledge of the very essence of the historical method, it is possible to obtain original information that is very useful for sociohistorical analysis.

On the other hand, by applying content analysis, which could be an auxiliary tool of the historical method, it is possible to gain a deeper insight into the content of the original notices, the intention of their authors, the message that is sent to the audience, as well as the audience's reactions to the message that is presented in such a way (Manić, 2017). Of course, hermeneutics thus imposes itself as an inevitable general scientific method, necessary for any sociological research (Baščarević, 2023).

### 4. CONCLUSION

As indicated at the very beginning, the text consists of several parts. In the first part, the author presented the basic ideas that he further considers in the paper. In the second part, a brief overview of the most important sociological definitions of the city is presented, moving chronologically, from the origin of this scientific discipline to its contemporary understandings. The third part presents the most important theoretical and methodological assumptions in the sociological study of the city. At this point, more precisely the concluding consideration, the sublimation of all the above is foreseen.

The author's intention is to bring the reader closer to contemporary sociological problems in the study of the sociology of the city. Depending on their primary research interests, they move in different directions. However, as urban sociology is a body of systematically arranged knowledge about a certain range of social reality, it means that it studies the general and typical in the society of the city, in two ways: (1) as concrete phenomena, which occur at a certain time and in a certain place, and concrete relationships between them, and (2) seeks to determine what these concrete phenomena and relationships have in common and what laws exist between them.

This means that relationships, collectives (social groups, social categories, classes and institutions) and collective behavior of urban society, not excluding the individual himself, his needs, and the difficulties he faces in urban life, are the subject of this science. In this regard, as a general conclusion we can draw the following - the researcher's interest, but also his practical and scientific aspirations, depends on the problem he will consider primary in his research, and therefore on which method, technique and instrument he will use in own elucidation of contemporary urban phenomena.

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