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## Chapter 5

### NOTION AND STEPS OF SOCIAL ANALYSIS

#### Notion and Functions of Social Analysis

The term social analysis or societal analysis is not always used in the same sense. *In the narrow sense* it means an attempt *to analyze a situation* or a social problem objectively, independent of the doer and the purpose of the analysis. Therefore, social analysis is not a ready-for-use tool to solve social problems.

In the *broad sense*, the social analysis of the narrow sense is used in connection with an *attempt to change the situation* or solve the analyzed problem. Therefore, social analysis tries to relate a scientific analysis with ethical sensitivity, namely being concerned with what actions to take. In this sense, a social analysis assumes and relies on certain ethical values; it is used as a tool to attain a certain objective. Therefore, the two concepts are not contradictory to each other because the first sense should underlie the second.

The distinction is also reflected in the term “social.” On one hand, “social” has the same meaning as “societal,” the opposite of “individual” or “personal.” It is simply a descriptive term as used in social analysis in the narrow sense. On the other hand, “social” is also used to mean “a positive value”, namely an attitude or structure which cares for neighbors, either in the sense of doing good to the poor or in the sense of a just social structure. The word “social” in “social analysis” of the broad sense at least contains the second sense.

If the distinction is applied to the theme “poverty as a challenge for the life of faith,” a social analysis is seen as a tool to eradicate poverty in accordance with the Gospel ideals. Thus, it is a tool to manifest faith. A person who conducts such analysis is trying to discover factors or powers responsible for poverty in order to involve himself/herself in the life and the struggle of the poor. However, this attempt can be successful only if supported by social analysis in the narrow sense, namely the right perception of the reality of poverty.

In this chapter, the background of social analysis, particularly the meaning of “value-free” will first be presented from the viewpoint of social sciences and epistemology. Afterwards, a methodology and concrete steps will be presented as a guide to conduct social analysis (see *Methodical Notes on the Implementation* in Chapter 3). The text *Methodical Background of Social Analysis* in Chapter 5 should be presented to all participants as a guide to conduct social analysis. The project leader can also present simpler and shorter guidelines.

#### Methodological Background of Social Analysis

##### *Basic Categories of Social Analysis*

To clarify the methodological and epistemological background, let us look at diagram 2 on page 67. This diagram contains a meta-theory of social sciences which helps us to think clearly and systematically by distinguishing various aspects which normally receive little attention and are often mixed up. It contains four main interrelated elements:

(1) The starting point is a society (in the national, regional or local level) which is always complex, because it contains interrelated factors. If we are to analyze a society or one of its problems, first we have to base its description on collected data. Thus, the foundation for a societal analysis in its true sense, is an attempt to investigate a situation or a selected social problem as objectively as possible by discovering the cause of the problem and establish the relationship of the factors.

To facilitate and help conduct the analysis, a distinction should be made between three main fields (sub-systems): politics, economy and socio-culture (in addition to geography and history as their foundation). These can be divided further into a number of sub-systems. This division can be changed as long as it is done logically and consistently.

The three main fields should be differentiated from their political, economic and socio-cultural dimensions. The term field or subsystem simply functions as a divisional category. The term dimension reveals something that penetrates the entire society. Thus, all sub-fields mentioned in the diagram have economic bases: they need physical infrastructure that should be economically supplied, which embodies the economic dimension. Similarly, there are concrete actions either from the government, a private group or a non-government institution which involve and influence all sub-fields (political dimension). The socio-cultural dimension includes cultural values and social structures which penetrate the society and influence all aspects of the life of the society (cf. *Basic Categories of Socio-cultural Analysis* in Chapter 9 and *Methodical Framework of Cultural Analysis* in Chapter 10).

(2) Implied in any social analysis, whether realized or not, is a certain method and theory. Any analysis, both commonsensical and scientific, must use certain terms and rely on a certain research method, which should be appropriate and suitable to the object of analysis. Also, there is no social analysis which is not colored by certain theoretical pre-concepts.

If, for example, in relation to the poverty problem a distinction is made between primary basic needs (food, clothing, home, health and basic education) and secondary needs (participation), such distinction is not to be found in the reality of the community itself but rather serves only as the framework of the theoretical-analytical explanation introduced by the people conducting the analysis. Similarly, the questions that guide the group report about the observation (cf. *Group Report on the Observation Result* in Chapter 4) manifest such a framework. As Gunnar Myrdal defines it, a theory is "a system of interrelated questions about reality." Of course, the theories relied upon should be qualified in order to help social analysis.

(3) As perhaps predicted, behind any theory, and thus behind any social analysis, there are certain value premises, realized or not. The values here might be basic ethical values such as justice, peace and equality, or preferential values or ideological, political or religious views such as "the poor are poor because of their indolence," the absoluteness of national stability or fundamentalism. The values may also be in the form of concrete goals, such as the increase of food products, the lowering of the birth rate or privatization of state companies. Of course, the three forms of values are interrelated. On the one hand, they constitute premises or

assumptions in analysis; on the other hand, they constitute the political goals selected for that particular purpose.

At any rate, such values, particularly those of the first and second senses, always influence social analysis. Accordingly, it seems impossible to conduct a completely objective social analysis. This basic problem, which has long been discussed in the social sciences, will be discussed in more detail below (see *The Problem of "Value Free" in Social Analysis* in Chapter 5), because it is rather complicated. The values chosen in this book will also be extensively discussed in Chapter 7.

(4) Any social analysis aims at politics in the wider sense, namely actions involving the common life of the community, either limited or unlimited (so, it is not a theory nor an action which deals with merely another individual). Politics in this broader sense is called a political dimension to differentiate it from the daily sense of politics, which is much narrower, namely, the political field or subsystem which is normally dominated by a certain person or group.

Social analysis in the broader sense is explicitly directed to politics, namely to find or to offer alternatives to political decisions or practical actions. However, in a narrow sense this analysis aims at identifying what effects will be created by various actions or the alternative political decision.

In that sense, politics is a bridge between social analysis and value premises. Politics starts from (the analysis of) the social reality and attempts to influence and change it by manifesting the premises chosen as the political goals. In other words, both social analysis relied upon (with theoretical backgrounds and value premises) and value premises as goals can be called the input of politics, while the political result, which is the change of the social reality, is called the output of politics. The change introduced by politics in reality can be in accordance with the targeted ideals but they may also be deviant because the analysis or the utilized means is not appropriate. All the problems of political manifestation will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 12.

*Conclusion:* In the diagram on page 67, the relation between the four elements shown by the arrows is not static, but rather should be understood as a reciprocal dynamic (dialectical) process. Considering the continuous change in any society (in this sense there is no static society) the concepts and theories as well as the value premises also continuously change. Therefore, social analysis should develop in accordance with the situation of the era and the human awareness of the existing problems. For example, the ecological problem, which twenty years ago was not identified, is currently receiving great attention.

Besides, it should be noted that persons who conduct a social analysis, either scientists, politicians or laypersons are always in the midst of the society and its changes, and can never make themselves fully free. Therefore, analysis and politics generally go hand in hand. The above distinction, however important, is only a result of human thought and abstraction.

### ***The Problem of "Value-free" in Social Sciences***

Social analysis in the broader sense should not be "value free" because it is meant to help political attempts. Any political decision, particularly if directed to social change or development, always starts from certain chosen goals based upon ethical considerations.

The above is different from the “value-free” demand in the social analysis of the narrow sense, which is a more complex and complicated problem. Such a demand in social sciences makes sense only when the goal is the analysis to yield a scientific and objective description of a particular society.

However, this demand is a basic problem and it is controversial in the scientific theories about social sciences. The problem is how far social sciences can and must be “value-free” or neutral when seen from the consideration of values. In his careful discussion, Max Weber demanded the sharp distinction between the scientific-objective approach, which should be “value-free,, and the political policy which cannot be free from ethics and, thus, can never be “value-free”.

However, from the beginning there have been many social scientists who believe that social sciences and scientific social analysis should contain certain values and, as a result, can never be “value-free”. They even assume that social analysis should take a clear position in order to be relevant and down-to-earth.

This book takes a stand which can be called a kind of middle way which has been more and more preferable. Weber’s demand for the clear distinction between objective facts and subjective evaluation (see *Methodical Pre-observation Orientation and Guides on Analyzing an Editorial* in Chapter 4) is very reasonable. The demand should, at least, become an ideal which we should try to reach considering the danger that persons who conduct social analysis can be trapped into by their favorite values or even by an ideological stand which does not permit them to see and examine the reality as it is objectively. In this sense, the whole analysis is only meant to justify their stand and will sacrifice the search for truth.

Though there should be a clear distinction between facts and judgement, it should be realized and taken into account that in reality there is a limit to the objectivity of social sciences and social analysis. From the sociology of science we know that any social observation is always colored by the social analyst’s life history, social environment, cultural circle, and personal and political interests. All these factors are influential and cannot be totally prevented. The most obvious is the choice of the object of the analysis and the utilization of the results. There are others as well. As mentioned above, the assumed social theories, the utilized scientific methods, and the adopted terms can never be totally “value-free.” In short, the approach of social analysis, what is observed and not observed, how the reality is defined and interpreted, and the conclusions drawn are all influenced and colored by value premises.

Then, what about the search for objectivity argued above? It seems there should be a modification of the understanding of “objective” measurement as brilliantly described by the seasoned economist Gunnar Myrdal, whose works show special concern for this problem. According to Myrdal, objectivity in social sciences is not the same as the absence of value premises relied upon. But, it should mean that the value premises which are relevant, significant, logical and realistic must be useful, meaningful, reasonable and realizable, must be explicitly formulated and must be rationally accountable. In this way, the value premises can be critically and scientifically studied and can be corrected as needed. On the contrary, the attitude of assuming oneself as “value-free” is very dangerous and self-deceiving because one can more easily be manipulated by various interests.

## **Concrete Steps of Social Analysis**

### ***Introductory Notes***

This method of social analysis can be used to analyze social units (such as villages and parishes), social problems (such as unemployment), social institutions (such as schools and development projects) and the like.

The following concrete steps are primarily meant to be taken jointly in work groups by interested groups or individuals, usually accompanied by an experienced person or somebody who can serve as a resource person.

Steps 1 to 6 are attempts to bring about, manage and prepare the analysis materials. In Steps 7 to 10, the materials are to be analyzed deeply. Step 11 is an ethical (theological) reflection. Step 12 is the beginning of the utilization of analysis attempts for the sake of creative praxis and politics.

If there is enough time, all steps should be taken one by one. If time is pressing, at least several important steps should be performed using auxiliary materials from the analysis of the accompanying person.

### ***Concrete Practical Steps***

(1) Making the choice of and determining the object of the analysis should be based on responsible reasons.

(2) Each participant expresses and accounts for his or her personal stand, or in other words, the premises of the values that she or he will use as temporary foundations and criteria in analyzing the chosen object. This step is more like a sharing than a discussion and assumes openness for correction and development of the position.

### **DESCRIPTION: WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE?**

(3) Collecting Facts and Data of any form (such as experience, oral information, statistics, reports, short questionnaires, observation, and newspaper clippings) which are at random and not very well-ordered (brainstorming). In this manner, a description of the problem, which is not biased by personal judgment, can be obtained.

(4) Classifying the facts and data pragmatically in three columns according to the field of social life, namely: (a) politics, (b) economy and (c) socio-culture. If necessary and suitable to the object of analysis, another extra column, such as (d) the Church, can be added. Into the columns, we can list additional data and facts, particularly those involving national problems, for example, with the help of the classification terms of the three fields mentioned above (see the diagram on page 67).

(5) Facts and data in each column are summed up systematically into approximately 10 basic formulations which briefly and precisely reveal a problem, cause-effect relations and the like. Therefore, the formulation must neither be too general nor too specific. Often one or two key words (concrete words may be inserted between brackets) are enough and the most feasible for the following group work, for example: bureaucracy (complicated, confusing, not flexible, and arbitrary), gap between the rich and the poor (luxury, waste, income).

[See “ Framework and summary of the group social analysis in enclosure 2. The example should be adapted (the formulation should be added on, crossed out or improved) based on the result of observation or general social knowledge. If time is lacking, the example can be used in the analysis.]

(6) Weighing the basic formulations in each column according to the priority (such as a big problem) and/or the importance (strategic factor) of the reality revealed by each formulation. This step can also be taken by awarding quantitative scores (10 for the most important, 9 for the next and so on) by the group members. Then the scores are added up and discussed together so that the group can make changes unanimously. The weighing should be based on knowledge but it unavoidably contains values.

### **ANALYSIS: WHY IS THE SITUATION SO? WHAT IS THE BACK GROUND?**

(7) There should be continuous questions about the materials given: Why are they as they are? What are the deeper reasons? In other words, we need to uncover the deep structures (vertical analysis) of the formulation of the problem in each column (for example by relating them with arrows). In this case, the participants can start with analytical questions (which are also useful for reviewing the analysis results), for example:

(a) *Politics:*

How is power distributed?

Who makes then decisions?

Who participates?

Who benefits from the decisions? Who suffers losses?

What is the process and the manner of decision making?

Which groups of the society (formal or informal) have political influence?

Who owns and controls the power structures (legal institutions, the police and the army)?

What is the role of the constitution?

What pattern of organization and authority is adopted?

In what form can people participate in politics?

Are there different political affiliations?

Who fights for which ideology and which political goals?

What is the relationship between the state and religions?

(b) *Economy:*

How can production (organization and technology), trade, distribution and consumption of goods and services be managed?

What kind of economic system and policy is relied upon?

What is the relation between capital and the labor?

Who benefits from the economic structure and police? Who suffers losses?

What are the roles of money, interests and the like?

Who controls the natural resources? How is the wealth distributed?

Who owns the production tools (land, capital, technology and education)? Is there any concentration of economic power?

What are the effects of production and consumption on the living and natural environment?

How influential is the international economy?

(c) *Socio-culture:*

What are the values, traditions and symbols that are adopted and relied upon by each group in the society?

How are these represented in their daily language?

What kind of influence do religions and ideologies have?

Which values, ideologies and myths determine politics and the economy?

What are the basic attitudes and expectations found in the society?

What is the most important social relation in the society? In which social structure and institution is the relation realized?

Is there any particular social problem?

(8) *Searching for similarities and differences* among the relations (cross analysis) by comparing the results of the vertical analysis in each column. For this purpose, the following questions can be raised:

What are the specific characteristics found in all aspects of social life?

What finally establishes the whole society?

Is there any dominant field or aspect?

Is there tension or conflict between one field and another?

Is there any indication of a conflict or a problem in the future?

## **HISTORICAL ASPECT: HOW DID ALL THESE TAKE PLACE? WHAT ABOUT THE FUTURE?**

(9) Reviewing the historical dimension (historical analysis) of the analysis leads us to ask these questions:

How can the present situation be historically accounted for? Is there any important period, event or transition?

Has there been any major change in recent years? Has there been a certain development dynamics in each field or in the whole society?

What trends are felt and seen in relation to future development?

In ten years' time, will the present situation be maintained and unchanged?

Is there any source of creativity and expectation?

(10) *Making a summary of the analysis*, such as by formulating a number of basic theses (each in one to three sentences) which constitute a kind of "general laws" (principles which in reality are decisive) behind the situation or the problem under study. The validity of the theses should be reviewed continuously. We should check if they are based on, and in accordance with the gathered data and facts.

(11) *Critically reviewing and highlighting value premises* presented by group members in the second step. With the analysis' results in mind, group examination and discussion which decides whether the values are really useful, meaningful, reasonable and realizable should be conducted. As starting points, the following questions can be presented:

How do I experience the reality under study?

How do I interpret and judge it?

Where is my place in this reality?

From such questions there will arise a number of human concerns (which should change Christians in formulating their faith concerns).

Based on the reflection, the group should seek for a consensus on the value and concrete goal that they will jointly fight for (this attempt is a theological reflection if performed in faith).

### **DECISION: WHAT CAN BE DONE? WHAT WILL WE DO?**

(12) *Drawing several conclusions* about what the members will and can do as individuals and as a group. Several concrete conclusions are very dependent on the type of the performed analysis, namely whether it is an exercise or a real attempt by a group who lives and works together. In formulating a policy or a work program attention should be given to "what can be reached" considering various obstacles and hindrances. There should also be planning containing the strategy to be taken, the priorities and the implementation of all the above.

### **EVALUATION: HOW FAR HAVE THE ADOPTED ACTIONS BEEN SUCCESSFUL?**

What has been achieved? What has not been achieved?

What are the unwanted side effects?

Why has there been some failures? Has there been any mistake in the analysis or in the planning or in the implementation?

### ***Selected Readings***

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