

## The Conceptualisation of Societies as Typologies and Their Impact on Instructional Supervision

Francis Ndlovu\*

Lecturer, Faculty of Education, Zimbabwe Open University, P. O. Box MP 1119 Mount Pleasant, Harare, Harare, Zimbabwe

**\*Corresponding author**

*Francis Ndlovu*

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**Abstract:** Societies are classified according to their development and use of technology. For most of human history, people lived in preindustrial societies characterized by limited technology and low production of goods. After the Industrial Revolution, many societies based their economies around mechanized labour, leading to greater profits and a trend toward greater social mobility. At the turn of the new millennium, a new type of society emerged. This post-industrial, or information, society is built on digital technology and nonmaterial goods. Educational and instructional supervision occur in a variety of societies; thus the need to explore the various typologies of societies that provide the context for the instructional supervision process.

**Keywords:** Conceptualisation, societies, typologies, impact, supervision, instructional.

**INTRODUCTION**

Educational and instructional supervision occur in a variety of societies. However, many junior students of social sciences, particularly those of sociology and education, are usually introduced to the concept of society as though there is one idea of society. As Alant [1] point out, this is of course a false impression as there are many divergent or even conflicting models of society.

**Some frameworks for analysing societies**

The conceptualisation of society adopted by a social scientist will, to a very large extent, be determined by his / her own perspectives.

This can be seen clearly in the structural-functional analysis of society by Parsons [2], Weber [3] and Marx [4]. According to Parsons [5], for example, society as a special type of a social system is characterised by a high degree of self-sufficiency in relation to its environment. In this regard society can be analysed in terms of its values, norms, roles and so on.

Karl Marx [6] on the other hand, sees society as a product of people's reciprocal action. Society is analysed by Marx [7] in terms of two basic structural dimensions, namely a super structure (the state, military organisation, law, the family, education, religion and morality based on the ideologies of a particular society) and a subculture which is the material basis of society manifested in the productive forces (the class system, production relations, products and means of production) Alant [1]. Clearly Marx bases his analysis on conflict and change.

The structural-functional analysis of Weber [3] provides yet another way of analysing society. Weber [3] who seems opposed to Durkheim's [8] reification of society as an entity sees society as an entire system of

interrelated and interconnected institutions, collectivities and groups Alant et al., [9]. Weber's [3] frame of reference includes concepts for the analysis of social conflict and order: power systems, social relationships, kinds of order and patterns of relationships between institutions in certain types of society. For Weber [3], therefore, society has an objective dimension as well as a subjective dimension such as groups, relations and so on.

Principally, therefore social philosophers and sociologists differ on their conceptualisation and analyses of society. This is so, mainly because of the different perspectives they employ. For example, great philosophers like Plato and Augustine and classical sociologists such as Comte, Durkheim, Marx and Weber all developed fairly distinctive hypothesis of societies, following largely, the principal perspectives of functionalism, Marxism, or phenomenology. Ultimately though, different types of society can be distinguished on the basis of the particular stage of development and their productive agents as can be seen in the works of three modern theorists whose respective societal models mirror the above respective approaches.

**Parson's structural-functional typology of societies**

Parsons [5] one of the modern sociologists in his book *The Evolution of Societies* uses his method of organismic structural analysis to demonstrate how, through centuries, societies have undergone an evolutionary process of increasing differentiation segmentation and functional socialisation. This has according to Alant [1] resulted in different societies which, if compared, reveal different structural features in that the effect of the process of increasing differentiation on cultural, social, political and economic institutions varies to the extent that the adaptive capacity differs from one society to another. In consequence, some societies are more successful in controlling their environment than others.

In this regard, Parsons [5] identifies six development "evolutionary breakthroughs":

- The emergence of a system of social stratification;
- An explicit cultural legitimation due to differentiation of the cultural system;

- The institutionalisation of authority of office;
- The introduction of a market mechanism for mobilising resources;
- The establishment of a rational and generalised legal system; and
- The implementation of a democratic power structure and association.

Working from these assumptions Parsons [5] analysed and compared several types of societies, namely primitive societies, advanced primitive societies, archaic society, advances historical intermediate societies, transition to modern societies, modern societies and post-modern societies.

Parsons [5] uses a consensus model to develop a comprehensive typology of societies and describes his method as an evolutionary and comparative one founded on a structural functional frame of reference. His typology can be summarised as in Table-1 below.

**Table-1: Parsons' Typology of Societies**

Type and description	Characterised mainly by
<b>Primitive Societies</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Primitive</li> <li>• Advanced primitive</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Highly homogenous at social and cultural levels; predominance of kinship systems</li> <li>• Stratification; some form of political organisation</li> </ul>
<b>Intermediate Societies</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Archaic</li> <li>• Advanced</li> <li>• "Seed bed"</li> <li>• Transition to modern societies</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Literacy, cosmological religion</li> <li>• Comprehensive political organisation</li> <li>• Cultural innovations</li> <li>• Diffuse hierarchical relations</li> </ul>
Modern Societies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enlightenment (reason and science, not religion advance human progress)</li> </ul>
Post Modern Societies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Completion of modernisation.</li> </ul>

**Adopted from Alant [1]****Habermas' Marxist typology of societies**

Habermas [10] in his book *Legitimation crisis* advanced a model of societies that contrasts that of Parsons. Using the Marxist perspective, he distinguished at least four types of societies.

Starting with primitive societies, Habermas [10] argued that in this type, family structures totally determine the social interactions. For him, the prominent forces of change in such societies are demographic growth, ecological factors and intra-ethnic dependence.

In Habermas' [10] model of traditional societies, the political institutions dominate the whole social setting. As Alant [1] observe, the bureaucratisation of authority results in differentiation between a power elite and the kinship system. The elite exercise control over production and distribution of

social wealth. In a sense, this is a state centred society. The use of power to maintain ownership of the means of production by the elite hampers social integration because of conflicting interests. Opposing interests are kept under control by ideological rhetoric and force.

Habermas [10] posits that in the advanced or organised capitalist society the economic institutions are characterised by monopoly and oligopoly. Oligopoly is situation where the market is demanded by a few produces or suppliers falling between a situation where there is what is known as perfect competition and one in which there is monopoly, domination of the market by one producer or supplier [10]. State intervention in economic affairs is quite significant. In this regard, the state endeavours to control activities to enhance rationalisation, to exercise technical control and to continuously adapt to the capitalist system. For Habermas [10] this is a crisis-ridden society and the

crisis can only be overcome by large-scale social transformation.

To discuss the concepts of post-capitalist and post-modern societies, Habermas [10] uses the Marxist concept of post-industrial society to claim that the examination of the crisis in the capitalist stage creates a possibility of understanding better the post-modern society. A post-modern society is characterised by heterogeneity at social, cultural, religious and political levels [1].

#### Zijderveld phenomenological typology of societies

In his book *The abstract society*, Zijderveld [11] developed an interesting phenomenological typology of societies. Zijderveld [11] argues that a person is a double being to the extent that on the one hand, he/she is unique while on the other hand he/she is a social being who plays predefined roles. Fundamentally therefore, according to Zijderveld [11], a person is an ambivalent being and therefore proposes that he/she be seen as what he terms a homo duplex. Put differently, a human being duplicates himself/herself in roles which are strange his/her essence. Essentially Zijderveld [11] develops his typology of societies by analysing three societies: contemporary Western society, ancient Graeco – Roman and medieval society and non-industrial developing society.

Zijderveld [11] starts by discussing the modern rational pluralistic society, which is, in his view, the result of the many social, economic, political, religious, technological and scientific revolutions which are the mark of the modern western society.

Turning to Graeco – Roman and mediaeval society, Zijderveld [11] argues that in these societies human beings experienced the world as a static structure. Such people, according to Zijderveld [11] lived in a society with a strict and even rigid system of stratification legitimised by abstract and speculative metaphysics. Theology and philosophy dominated the scientific and intellectual scene.

According to Zijderveld [11] the contemporary Western society is characterised by the philosophy that the good society is one in which individuals accept responsibility for their decisions, and that this means that they should have the greatest possible freedom to make their economic and social choices. Furthermore, it is believed that economic freedom is essential in order to preserve political freedom.

The last type of society discussed by Zijderveld [11] is the non-industrial developing society.

The people in a non-industrial developing society are themselves so closely related to nature that they cannot objectify nature; life for them is a gift of God or gods in the here or now. Additionally, in the non-industrial developing society, authority is unquestionable and is viewed as a mechanism against anomic order. Society is firmly rooted in the kinship system; social and system integration are maintained by mechanical solidarity. This type of society is characterised by a tendency to inertia resulting in a general resistance to change. It is also affected by poverty, disease, high infant mortality rates and illiteracy.

#### CONCLUSION

Educational and instructional supervision occur in a variety of societies; thus the need to explore the various typologies of societies that provide the context for the instructional supervision process. This helps the instructional supervisor to understand the context in which he/she carries out his/her supervision activities.

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