Relational Sociology: New Era in the Social Network Analysis or an independent trend?

Daria Maltseva, ANR-Lab, RSUH

Moscow, May 30, 2015
Basis of presentation

Реляционная социология: новый этап в развитии анализа социальных сетей или самостоятельное направление?

[Relational Sociology: new era in the Social Network Analysis or an independent trend?]

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The question

1970s: *Social network analysis* as an independent discipline
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1980-90s: Other theoretical traditions, including Relational sociology
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1970s: **Social network analysis** as an independent discipline

1980-90s: Other theoretical traditions, including **Relational sociology**

- Relational Sociology – a “right” version of Social network analysis?
- What is the level of sociological knowledge?
SNA as a discipline

Appearance:
• Auguste Comte – society as relations between individuals
• Georg Simmel - effects of the social relations structures on their contents
• Interdisciplinary nature: social psychology, sociometry, economics, political science, social geography, anthropology, etc.

Important influence:
• American quantitative statistical analyzes (critique),
• British anthropology (ethnographic approach),
• Mathematics (graph theory and discrete mathematics),
• Computers, programs for data analysis and visualization

Institutionalization - 1970-80th: INSNA, conferences, journals, courses.
SNA as a discipline

• Ann Mische*: “Is network analysis merely a **cluster of techniques** for analyzing the structure of social relationships, or does it constitute a broader conceptual framework, **theoretical orientation**, or even **philosophy of life**?”

SNA: searching for the theory


Barry Wellman: structural network analysis

Aim: the study of social structure

Individuals, groups of individuals, their characteristics and categories

Relations as connections between nodes

Deep structures determining the content of relations, restricting and permitting influence
Barry Wellman: structural network analysis

1. **Anti-methodological individualism, anti-categorical imperative**: grouping people from equivalent *structural position*, not *categorical affiliation*.

2. **Anti-normative explanation of individuals behavior**: norms arise from positions in the systems of social relations; *effects* of structural positions, but not *reasons*.

3. **Anti-dyadic approach**: social structures *determine* dyadic relations.

4. **Anti-group approach**: *networks*, not *groups*.

5. **Duality of groups and actors**: nature of groups is determined by interconnections of actors inside them, nature of actors is determined by interconnections of groups (through their group affiliations).

6. **General analytical principles**.
Critique of Barry Wellman model

Emily Ericson*: the model is not a consistent theory:

• Has important *ontological prerequisites*, but is not complex enough to be a *theoretical system of views*.

• **Does not form a coherent set of assumptions** that can be used to generate *hypotheses*.

• “Can not be regarded as a *theory* in any sense of this word”.

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Gaps of structural explanation

Insufficient attention to cultural aspects of networks (including norms); deprivation of voice of Culture.

The concept of human agency: no universal model of human agency.

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- Studying structures needs inclusion of cultural backgrounds of behavior, as meaning of relations can change in different cultural and intersubjective contexts;
- Empirical networks can be understood as networks of meanings, founded in discourse and products of culture.

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Turn to Relational sociology

Relational sociology as a discipline

Appearance – 1980-90th, several intellectual centers:


“New York school” of relational sociology (Paul F. Lazarsfeld Center for the Social Sciences at Columbia University and the New School for Social Research):

• Series of ongoing seminars with H. White, Ch. Tilly, M. Emirbayer, A. Abbot, K. Carley, R. Collins, P. DiMaggio, V. Zelinzer.

• Important works, including:


Relational sociology as a discipline

• Parts of analysis are independent entities, prior to relationships, which, however, receive their identity only based on these relationships, from changing the functional roles they play in the process.
  - The object is formed during the transaction.
  - Elements are not separated of the streams in which they are involved (and vice versa) -> anti-substantialism principle.

• Both structural and cultural (local practices and meanings, discourses, repertoires and norms) components are in the focus of analysis.
Harrison White: Synthesis of SNA and cultural approach

Social networks as empirically observed relations

+ phenomenology of networks, studying of meanings

**Networks are culturally created processes of communications**, which means the merging of network relations (*structures*) and discourse practices (*culture*). The core of communications is *language* – act of translation from one person to another, from which *meaning* emerge.
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Emily Ericson: searching for the theory of social networks

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Coherent formalism does not lead to the adoption of the culture and agency as components, giving greater theoretical weight to SNA
## SNA & RS: comparison

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- Both SNA and RS has characteristics of theory
- Another view on SNA – not as a “wrong” version, but the direction, which analytical power is in ignorance of content and context.
- Critique of SNA lead to the emergence of separate theoretical model (RS).
SNA & RS in the structure of sociological knowledge

- Social network analysis
- Relational sociology
- The theory of Social action (H. White)
- Actor-network theory
- The theory of transitivity
- The theory of "six handshakes"
- Etc.

Paradigm
- Research \ Theoretical perspective
- Theoretical tradition
- Research program

Theoretical approach
- General sociological theory
- Special sociological theory

Theory
- Methodology

Explanation models
- Methodological strategy

Applied empirical study

Structuralism

Interpretive paradigm

Social network analysis

Relational sociology

Research program

Theoretical tradition

Research

Methodology

Theoretical perspective

Explanation models
Approaches to understanding the links between culture, structure and agency

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<th>M. Emirbayer, J. Goodwin: Structure, Culture and Agency</th>
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<td>2. Networks as shaping culture (or vice versa):</td>
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<td>• network clusters as incubators of culture;</td>
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<td>• network positions as generating categorical identities (or catnets);</td>
<td>4. Synthesized approach;</td>
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<td>• network bridges as a source of cultural resources and creativity.</td>
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<td>4. Networks as culture via interaction</td>
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