

# What use is sociology?

- Hard to say...
- Surely not to show how you should behave or how your life should look like
- Systems theory: be content to do a few things well done
- For instance: describing society - but how? In a scientific way – *scientific!*

# Scientific?

- Systems theory: comparison=choosing a criterion to compare different phenomena which have something in common
- Organizations: what have in common companies, bureaucracies, schools and universities, football teams, armies, religious confessions, and - why not? - criminal organizations, judicial courts and art galleries?

# Same and different

- The variety of organizations is very large, in fact: every social context has its own organizations, virtually without exception
- But at the same time they are very similar, on the operational as well as on the structural level
- Operational level: decisions
- Structural level: decision premises

# Decision-making

- Organizations communicate decisions (a peculiar type of communication)
- Decisions claim to determine the future, to start a new story
- But for systems theory they are just “communication quanta” that force the system to react: a decision is always a difference which makes a difference...
- ... and its consequences are determined by the recipient, not by the intention (utterance)

# Decision premises

- Organizational structures are decision decision premises (a Herbert Simon's concept):
- Personnel
- Decisional programs (organizational aims and objectives, rules...)
- Inner communication routes (different roles, competences, responsibilities...)

# Organizational structures and decisions

- Organizational structures are produced by decisions...
- ...and decisions are produced by structures
- This kind of circularity is the basic characteristic of organizations (and of each other system)
- This implies, among other things, that there are no natural structures

# Modern society depends on organizations

- Organizations are central in our society
- We can plan everything about our future, but we can only intervene on the decision premises
- For instance reforms: we cannot decide to get better or even excellent...
- ...we can only change the decision premises: we can change the personnel, seek funding, constraining the behavior through rules, allocate competences and responsibilities...

# Modern society depends on self-produced uncertainty

- Every decision is risky;
- Every decision produces unintended consequences;
- Every decision produces dissent, even protest;
- Every decision always has alternatives – or it is everything but a decision



# Rationality?

- Rationality is one of the great myths of modernity...
- ... and organizations have always been regarded as the only “social place” where rationality can be ensured
- Fifties: bounded rationality or (eighties) even irrationality as a basis for decision-making processes

# Rationality???

- An organization is a collection of choices looking for problems, issues and feelings looking for decision situations in which they might be aired, solutions looking for issues to which they might be the answer, and decision makers looking for work." (Cohen, March and Olsen 1972)



# NAPOLEON

- His secret on the battlefield: “On s’engage, et puis on voit”
- With other words (ipsissima!): “Le grand art, c’est de changer pendant la bataille. Malheur au général qui arrive au combat avec un système”
- But, as we know, things may go wrong... even without a system and even if you are Napoleon

# An example of modern definition of organizations

- Specifically, I would suggest that the effective organization is garrulous, clumsy, superstitious, hypocritical, monstrous, octopoid, wandering, and grouchy (Karl Weick)