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Social Creation. A New Concept for Social Sciences and Humanities

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Social Creation. A New Concept for Social Sciences and Humanities

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Abstract

Social impact assessment in Social Sciences builds a base of knowledge transparency and direct involvement in social inequality, creating an alternative to the stagnation of scientific results and allowing them to become a real impact through society improvements. Four parameters inform and measure the degree of researchers' involvement in a scientific project and the improvements that this generates in society. These parameters are: *Dissemination*, *Transfer*, *Impact* and *Social Creation*. Social improvement does not come until *impact* is achieved, since *dissemination* does not ensure knowledge application, and *transfer* does not ensure that its application generates improvement as even sometimes it generates deterioration. However, we can achieve social impact by writing scientific publications about successful social realities that others have done. The new concept of *social creation* is a step beyond, and defines the process when from social research itself new successful social realities that improve society in ways that hitherto had not existed emerge.

Keywords: dissemination, transfer, impact, social creation



Creación Social. Un Nuevo Concepto para las Ciencias Humanas y Sociales

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Resumen

La evaluación del impacto social en las ciencias sociales construye una base de transparencia del conocimiento y de implicación directa en las desigualdades sociales, generando una alternativa al estancamiento de los resultados científicos y posibilitando que estos se conviertan en impacto real en forma de mejora de la sociedad. Cuatro parámetros permiten conocer y medir el grado de implicación de investigadores e investigadoras en un proyecto científico y las mejoras que este genera a nivel social. Estas son: Diseminación, Transferencia, Impacto y Creación Social. La mejora social no llega hasta que no conseguimos impacto ya que la diseminación no asegura que se aplique el conocimiento y la transferencia no asegura que la aplicación genere mejora, a veces hasta genera empeoramiento. Sin embargo, podemos conseguir impacto social haciendo publicaciones científicas sobre las realidades sociales exitosas que han hecho otros y otras. El nuevo concepto de ‘creación social’ es un paso más, es cuando de la propia investigación social surgen nuevas realidades sociales exitosas que mejoran la sociedad en formas que hasta aquel momento no habían existido.

Palabras clave: diseminación, transferencia, impacto, creación social



Certainly, when Durkheim published *Les règles de la méthode sociologique* (1894) and later the magazine *L'Année Sociologique* (1898) founding the first Sociology department at University of Bordeaux, he very likely knew that he was creating a historical settlement for investigating social behavior. Later, Max Weber would also define sociology as a discipline for understanding “social action”:

Sociology (in the sense in which this highly ambiguous word is used here) is a science concerning itself with the interpretative understanding of social action and thereby with a causal explanation of its course and consequences. We shall speak of "action" insofar as the acting individual attaches a subjective meaning to his behaviour—be it overt or covert, omission or acquiescence. Action is "social" insofar as its subjective meaning takes account of the behaviour of others and is thereby oriented in its course (1978, p. 4)

It would be possible to refer to many authors, and all of them would coincide about the importance to recover the reasons for why sociology was created and developed. Framed in a context where societies needed more self-knowledge, sociology emerged as a science oriented to study social behavior, as well as to elucidate how to improve society. This need to understanding how society works and illuminating solutions to better face social problems has become even more important in today's society. There is no doubt that the current context claims for setting out which has to be the right direction not only of sociology but also of Social Sciences and Humanities (hereinafter, SSH) in general. In a moment in which that main essence about contributing to society seems to have been teared apart from the offices, these dynamics lead to both a social-institutional overall questioning and a systemic crisis for SSH. As August Comte stated:

[...] we find ourselves among the elements of social sciences, as yet too crude and confused to be established, by the others, by a review of what had before been achieved; but now, by the hand of our master, discriminated, arranged, and consolidated, so as to be ready to fulfil the conditions of true science as future generations bring their

contributions of knowledge and experience to build upon the foundation here laid. [...] (2000, p.21)

The IMPACT-EV project (Flecha, 2014-2018) –being this article part of it–, directed by CREA research center at the University of Barcelona¹, is an example. This EU-funded research project is aimed to develop a permanent system of selection, monitoring and evaluation of the various impacts of SSH research. In its first draft, the funding for specific research in SSH by the European Scientific Research Project Horizon 2020 was canceled because according to different social agents –poor people, cultural groups...– it was not contributing to make social improvements. In the end, the European Parliament restored the funding and another chance was given to research in SSH. Therefore, this time research needs to be carried out differently, that is, designed and implemented in order to achieve social impact and thus contribute to the improvement of society. Research groups like CREA with their investigations and theoretical contributions help to overcome the idea of science as a *goal* instead of as a *tool* for society, which is a loss in the historical perspective and in the meaning of what sociology is.

The analysis of the crisis of SSH adds to what Max Weber (1992) expounded about bureaucratization. As stated by him, bureaucratization of social sciences leads to an impersonality of work relations, a perpetuation of a range of standardized routines and work, and an authoritarian-based hierarchy. From unions to ministries, these dynamics appear in all the public functions and do not distinguish levels or powers. It is important to anticipate this discussion because according to Weber, bureaucratization involves in the first place a systematic division of labour, what leads not only to hierarchization but also to a specialized stagnation in a given field of labor, promoting the isolation from reality by completely neutralizing intersubjective relations. These characteristics also describe the crisis that SSH is experiencing in the 21st Century, in a context in which research has mostly turned its back on social reality, interactions and the looking for alternatives oriented to transform this reality. The development of Weber's premises represents a clear regression towards enhancing creativity, originality and especially the quantity and quality of production, perpetuating routines resistant to change and oriented to ensure the own

stability of those who hold a privilege situation. The author affirms that bureaucracy in social sciences meant a means for reaching a goal, while this process has currently reversed and the means has become a mere goal. As a reference, it is relevant to retake Beck's perspective about the loss of science's security and, consequently, of power:

Scientists actually are separated from the utilization of their work; they have no possibilities of influence at their disposal in that sphere; others are responsible. Consequently, scientists cannot be called to account for the actual consequences of the results they worked out from the analytic point of view. Even though people are beginning to speak a common language in many areas, the distances between theory and practice do not diminish but increases because of that fact, as do the possibilities for the application side to use the results according to their own interests (1992, p.171)

According to Habermas (1984), these bureaucratization processes studied by Weber and later revised by Parsons and Luhmann (Eisler, Elster & Inglehart, 2003) became a progressive colonization of the lifeworld. Thus, the current criticism to social sciences relies on how it is analyzed the role of the individuals within the social context and their potential for its transformation. By recovering the aim of social sciences, critical theories – being Habermas (1984) one of the most important critical theorists– call into question bureaucracy as an exclusory power, far away from solidary and creative approaches. Then, these analyses and especially those contemporary perspectives offered by authors such as Flecha, Gómez and Puigvert (2003) are the ones which can provide transformative social elements that contribute to the emancipation of SSH. Resulting from this, it is possible to observe how the theory of communicative action derived from communicative rationality incorporates the lifeworld in the study of social world. This access to the lifeworld generates a theory able to relink SSH and society and, in turn, return to SSH its most basic meaning and *raison d'être*

Four Essential Concepts

Analyzing precedents in order to locate the new conceptualization presented in this article, and thus establishing a starting point, it is possible to refer to the triennial results of the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA). PISA is survey which aims to evaluate and compare the education systems worldwide, and has become a state of the art, a photography of educational outcomes (Monereo, 2009). Hence, PISA is not a research –as just mentioned, it is a survey– so it cannot be neither understood nor analyzed through the lenses that are exposed in this article. Results from PISA are depicted today as an important revolution in the knowledge of the international educational standards. Even more, discussions about the causes that explain these results spreads out to experts, mass media and mainstream society. Even if it is a very good moment for PISA, its influence does not transcend the sphere of discussions, as this survey in itself does not allow a deep analysis of the students' educational performance nor the elaboration of strategies to overcome educational failure.

Contextualize PISA enables us to understand where we come from and where we are going, as well as mapping the different existing forms of doing scientific research. There are four parameters that allow us to know and measure the researchers' degree of involvement in a scientific project and the social improvements that it generates: *dissemination*, *transfer*, *impact*, and *social creation*. These parameters were explained by Flecha (2014a) in a presentation about the Horizon 2020 research programme which took place in Madrid, and since then they are starting to be known and assumed by different research-related institutions and agents in Europe.

To begin with, the concept *Dissemination* refers to get the results of scientific investigations to be known –although this does not necessarily mean that these results are implemented. In turn, when scientific results not only get to be known but also achieve to be implemented, for instance, as the basis of social policies or interventions, it is called *Transfer*. But again, a transfer of scientific results from one social reality to another does not always involves an improvement of the latter –sometimes it even worsens the situation. In this sense, the use of the term *Social Impact* is reduced just to those cases in which the application of scientific results in a given social

reality achieves its social improvement, that is to say when a society reaches some of the social goals. An example in today's context would be to decrease the rate of unemployed people in Europe to 20 million, or school dropout to 10%. Despite this, it is also possible to get a social impact by publishing scientific articles about other successful social realities.

The classification presented in this article –*dissemination, transfer, impact*– evidences a catch situation: that parameters need always to be built upon previous one. For instance, social improvement is not achieved until the *impact* is reached, as far as *dissemination* does not necessarily mean that such disseminated knowledge is applied, and *transfer* does not necessarily mean that such application leads to social improvement. Beyond these parameters, this article draws on the contribution of the IMPACT-EV project (Flecha, 2014-2018) and aims at going further with a new concept, the one of *Social Creation*, created by Flecha (2014b):

The concept of Social Creation and the evaluation of the Social Sciences and Humanities: Social Sciences need to make a qualitative leap over what have been until now, not just to clearly contribute to the improvement of the society but also in order to overcome the increasing questioning that society is doing of its validity, even the need for its existence. Some areas of the humanities have the concept of artistic creation that clarifies the contribution that, for example, people like Picasso had done to humanity, even though they have never done any article or book. In certain sciences is also clear that the value of an article is not in its draft but rather on the discovery that explains, for example, the article that a year ago announced the obtaining of embryonic stem cells from an adult cell in humans. Social sciences require the concept of social creation that clearly reveals the contributions that are making to improve the social reality. For example, the same author has been able to do an article about the Mondragon cooperative model and another about the Dialogic Literary Gatherings. Nowadays, both have the same merit if they are of the same quartile of JCR and the same impact. However, the contribution is not the same if the first article explains a social reality that the author has not contributed to create or develop and, conversely, the second explains a social reality that he has created. Even the present forms of evaluation give no credit to who did create the Mondragon Cooperative, since they did not

publish any article on this topic (Flecha, 2014b, Message 1) ²

This involves a step forward in many different ways of investigating and the degree of the relationship established between scientists and social reality. The aim of the new concept of *social creation* is to reach new successful social realities in order to improve societies in a way nonexistent until that moment.

Social Creation in SSH: Creating Social Realities

As mentioned, SSH need a qualitative leap. Not only to improve societies, but also to overcome an increasing tendency coming from society itself that questions its validity and even the need of its existence. Social sciences need the concept of *social creation* to make clear its contributions to the improvement of social reality. As an example, an author could write an article about the cooperative model of Mondragón (Flecha & Ngai, 2014, Burgués, Martín & Santa Cruz, 2013), and another one could write one about Dialogic Literary Gatherings (Flecha, 2000). Today, both articles would have the same merit if they have the same quartile ranking and impact factor within a given category or index. However, their contributions are not the same, as the first article presents a social reality which has not been created or developed (or co-created, or co-developed) by the author, but instead, the second one explains a social reality which has been indeed created by the author. Even, according to the methods currently used to assess the impact of research in SSH there are no merits for those who created the cooperative model of the Mondragon Corporation because they did not write any article about it. In this sense, it is possible to make a remarkable comparison between SSH and Natural Sciences. For instance, when a vaccine is discovered, articles about its importance and characteristics are written and published in top ranked scientific journals included in the Journal Citation Reports (JCR) and other well-known indexes. However, in this simile the transformation of SSH does not refer to the articles but to the vaccine, which is the actual creation that can transform reality. Research on natural sciences explains and speaks about its creations, and not the other way around; SSH, getting back to the origins and going beyond, should be able to create social realities, analyze them and speak

about them, focusing the evaluation of SSH researchers' curriculum also on their ability to create new realities and tools for society.

The reflections done by Weber (2012) about social sciences and natural sciences are also useful to deepen into the abovementioned example. He considered that both sciences never reach entirely their goals but that they always need from more contributions, being built on the basis of scientific rigor and thus constantly transforming themselves. Therefore, what this author suggests is that science is in an on-going process of renovation. Weber's consideration is of major relevance to seriously reflect on why renovation, updating and having the capacity to analyze contextual changes are important abilities that SSH researchers should develop. However, unlike the case of natural sciences, in SSH knowledge is subordinated to question marks that scientific research directly raises to reality. This is a key process as it provides to science the ability to create new social realities, thus improving the connection among SSH and politics. Sociology (Weber, 2012) raises a duality between people of action and scientists. Yet this separation, social creation needs of both characteristics to enable research investigations to get out of the offices and transfer it to specific areas of the social reality, not as ingredients or remedies but as participation processes, exchange of knowledge and creation. The basic tool to enhance those links is communicative action (Habermas, 1984). In order to regain the meaning of SSH it is necessary to create an intersubjective agreement with the world and reality. It can be observed how many scientists who pretend to play the role of sociological watchers have a lack of communicative action to connect with social practices, assuming that the power of systems are the only way to understand reality.

Maybe, what is needed in order to understand the opportunities that are opened up when scientific research connects and interacts with society creating new realities is the existence of an approach to explore practical cases (explained below by two projects directed by CREA). First the project *IMPACT-EV Evaluating the impact and outcomes of European SSH research* (Flecha, 2014-2018), funded by the 7th Framework Programme for Research of the European Commission. The aim of IMPACT-EV is to design a system to evaluate the scientific, political and social impact of those research projects in SSH funded by the EU. The project is structured in two

different phases. The first phase aims at collecting all kind of information and data about the impact of SSH research by revising the existing knowledge about experiences of evaluation provided by scientists in an international level. In the second one, *cases of success* and failure based on scientific evidences are analyzed. The analysis resulted from this second phase (still under development) is what will allow to create a system of evaluation for SSH projects by assessing their impact beyond the academia, looking at how evidences are both contrasted and shared with reality and in turn transforming it.

As IMPACT-EV is still in progress, to take a look to the EU-funded research *INCLUD-ED. Strategies for inclusion and social cohesion in Europe from education* (Flecha, 2006-2011) might be a useful option too. INCLUD-ED has been the only project in SSH selected by the European Commission as one of the ten “Success Stories” from the European Research Framework Programmes in recognition of its added-value of research. Among the six longitudinal case studies of elementary schools developed under this investigation, two of them were carried out in Spain: one in a school located in Albacete, and the other in a school located in Barcelona. Both case studies were schools with similar characteristics: located in a low SES neighborhood and with a large percentage of students with a minority background, including immigrants and ethnic and cultural minorities. Besides analyzing the poverty and the rates of school dropout of both cases, INCLUD-ED succeeded in contributing to change the social reality of the two contexts. This was done by involving the grassroots community members (families, students, teachers, representatives of local associations, among others) in the process of transformation of both the school and their neighborhood, which was created based on an egalitarian dialogue among them and the INCLUD-ED research team, the former providing their lifeworlds and the latter the scientific knowledge resulted from the investigation (Aubert, 2011). Therefore, INCLUD-ED defined ‘Successful Educational Actions’ as those evidence-based actions that have effectively contributed to improve students’ academic performance as well as enhanced social cohesion and inclusion. Results show how in one of the schools, during the 2001-2007 period, the percentage of students that reached the basic competences on reading increased from 17% to 85%, and the number

of students with foreign origins went from 12% to 46%. This evidences how students' academic results cannot be analyzed as a direct consequence of their socioeconomic profile or the characteristics of the context in which the school is located, but such achievement relates to the actions that were implemented to increase the effect of the educational projects (INCLUD-ED Consortium, 2012).

All that said, the INCLUD-ED project supposes a precedent of success and reveals the capacity of SSH to create new social realities on the basis of both scientific knowledge and a communicative praxis, which assuming egalitarian dialogue pursues the amelioration of society.

Social Creators

*Non ha l'ottimo artista alcun concetto
che un marmo solo in sé non circoscriva
col suo soverchio, e solo a quello arriva
la mano che ubbidisce all'intelletto...*

Michelangelo Buonarroti (XVI)

In some way, social creators can be understood in a similar fashion than art creators. Art and artist's condition have acquired a very important social status (Furió, 2012) which can be divided into two main characteristics. On the one hand, the promotion of a well-known social position; and on the other hand, very important and not yet studied, the satisfaction of an artist while performing an art creation. For instance, we would not imagine about somebody saying to Van Gogh: *C'mon, stop painting, enjoy yourself a bit, let's go to the beach!*. We would never imagine this because the most people assumes that the artist –following the example, Van Gogh– felt satisfied with the activity that he was performing. History of Art has accustomed the public's to contemplate the figure of the artist as an exceptional being, someone capable of creating precious works. In this way, we can agree without much discussion that artists have acquired such high social prestige that is common to hear some clichés like «You know, he's an artist», even to justify attitudes that would not be tolerated in other contexts. The idea of sublimity in art and artists drives us from the classical Greece to the

enhancement of passions and attitudes, usually far away from rationalistic trends. Next quote from Edmund Burke (1756) helps to understand this categorization of Art as something above the human condition:

Whatever is fitted in any sort to excite the ideas of pain and danger, that is to say, whatever is in any sort terrible, or is conversant about terrible objects, or operates in a manner analogous to terror, is a source of the sublime; that is, it is productive of the strongest emotion which the mind is capable of feeling. I say the strongest emotion; because I am satisfied the ideas of pain are much more powerful than those which enter on the part of pleasure. Without all doubt, the torments which we may be made to suffer are much greater in their effect on the body and mind, than any pleasures which the most learned voluptuary could suggest, or than the liveliest imagination, and the most sound and exquisitely sensible body, could enjoy (1756, section VII).

Exploring these premises invites us to raise and reflect on the idea of social creator, as well as on which are the characteristics we can compare, and on the ways that such idea can be useful for improving the social recognition of SSH. Different to the premises given by History of Art, social creators currently have a very low social recognition, and are even questioned instead of supported and socially recognized. Besides from social recognition, institutional recognition has also decreased, which is generating increasingly precarious economic conditions. On the other hand, it is necessary to point out on the popular belief that social creators have a low satisfaction towards the social creation on which they work. Usually, social creation is presented as something impossible to be liked, the most basic justification being that people who actually do it is because they are motivated by religion or ideology. These understandings focus on an internal satisfaction rather than on the idea of the social creation as it is understood in this article. Something that evidences this lack of satisfaction in SSH is that many scientists devote their academic activity to describe social problems and make of them an event of the media.

It is also important to underline, from art and politics, Walter Benjamin's book *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* (2009) and his

concepts of «know» and «transform», which are key to bolster both artistic and social creation from a basis of knowledge and reflection.

In this study it is almost indispensable to refer to coherence as a basic principle to the concept of creator and social creator, distinguished from situation or recognition of the artists. Coherence in SSH is a core principle to transform social reality: a good creator or social creator loses his or her recognition in a moment in which academic, economic, personal or public coherence fails. By contrast, an artist enjoys widespread recognition without caring about his or her individual level of coherence. If we analyze History, there have been numerous cases of artists that even with their incoherent behaviors or eccentricities have enjoyed of an important social recognition. Cases such as Salvador Dalí's contacts with Franco's government or Jackson Pollock's sexism, among many others. Conversely, we cannot mention cases of social creators who are not coherent since coherence is the main justification and exemplification of SSH towards society.

Conclusion

Every perfect traveler always creates the country where he travels.

Nikos Kazantzakis (1965, p.88)

Going back to the beginning of the article but advancing towards a motivating and constructive perspective, we do assume that *social creation* directly involves an increase of the reliability of social agents on SSH, underlining direct benefits for the community and its transformations from our actions. Dialogue, negotiation and consensus should re-conquer those spaces that until recently have been ruled by unquestioned hierarchical authorities, in both society and social sciences. This dialogic turn (Flecha et al., 2003) involves that social groups that have traditionally been excluded (e.g.: women, immigrants, cultural groups) from spaces of public dialogue regain their prominence in the public sphere. Achieving this purpose requires that social scientists engage in an authentic process of social creation and abandon the use of methods that are based on power relations and conceive persons as mere research objects. Thus, high-quality scientific research in SSH is this oriented to building synergies among researchers and

the ‘researched subjects’, the one that enables social transformation and the improvement of people's lives, which is indeed capable of generating *social creations*. This type of research investigations overcome the theoretical duality object/subject and takes into account the contributions of the main authors of SSH (Davila, Flecha & Vargas, 2004).

We have already experienced that when SSH is brought to the very diverse publics, constructed *to* them and *with* them, it is not only possible to develop science with passion and satisfaction but also science oriented to the improvement of society and deeply able of this achievement. When this occurs, social creations can be balanced with the most complex poems of García Lorca and the brightest pictures of Matisse, demonstrating that any creation can be made without motivation and satisfaction.

Far from pretending this article to become propaganda, we want to share the satisfaction that creators feel every day when realities are changed and transformed. Realities from our neighborhoods, our schools, our friends, the adolescents with who we discuss... those daily social creations generated for them constitute the force and provide us with the values needed in order to develop research investigations such as INCLUD-ED. According to Flecha, Gómez and Puigvert (2003):

Scientist's task in the twenty-first century is not to improve society, but to provide social agents (those who transform society with their actions) with analytical elements. By following this path, sociology will reach its due social recognition and will become a priority in all agendas, which, in turn, will allow scientists to devote themselves to a professionally rigorous and personally inspiring task. This is our job-and yours (Flecha et al., 2003, p.134).

Notes

¹ For more information see www.creaub.info

² Own translation from the original in Spanish

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