

2

Paradigms in Qualitative Research

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2.1 Introduction

The aim of the chapter is to raise novice researchers' awareness of the significance of philosophical assumptions for their practical activity. The text presents the basic terms connected with the methodology of social sciences. The entire discussion is centered on the issue of paradigms. Various approaches within the framework of basic philosophical assumptions are discussed—concerning the nature of social reality (ontologies), the nature of scientific cognition (epistemologies), and practical ways of conducting social research (methodologies). An important element of the text is the presentation of two classifications of paradigms in social sciences with particular consideration given to qualitative research.

This work was supported by the Polish National Science Center grant 2013/11/D/HS4/03878

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M. Ciesielska, D. Jemielniak (eds.), *Qualitative Methodologies in Organization Studies*,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-65217-7_2

2.2 Paradigms in Social Sciences

The term “paradigm” is usually associated with the figure of Thomas Kuhn, an American historian and philosopher of science, who died in 1996, and his most famous book, entitled *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. Kuhn’s work concerns a certain synthetic view on the history of science. Let us add that it is dedicated to natural history, which has significant implications for the shape of the presented concept of the development of science. According to Kuhn, the development of science as a separate field of human activity is discontinuous in nature and, broadly speaking, consists in the alternate occurrence of periods of so-called normal science and scientific revolutions. The term **normal science** refers to “research firmly based upon one or more past scientific achievements, achievements that some particular scientific community acknowledges for a time as supplying the foundation for its further practice” (Kuhn 1970, p. 10). Therefore, the period in which normal science prevails consists in scientists acting in accordance with generally accepted rules without the need to ponder over them or give consideration to the correctness of the adopted assumptions. Giddens (1993) believes that in Kuhn’s perspective, the success of the development of science actually depends on suspending “critical reasoning”, on accepting the set of basic philosophical assumptions concerning the manner of getting to know the world as obvious.

Scientific revolution means breaking with the only generally shared manner of practicing science; it means moving from one universally accepted manner of studying reality to another, resulting in the emergence of a new tradition of institutional science. As Kuhn claims (1970, p. 111), “during revolutions scientists see new and different things when looking with familiar instruments in places they have looked before. It is rather as if the professional community had been suddenly transported to another planet where familiar objects are seen in a different light and are joined by unfamiliar ones as well. Of course, nothing of quite that sort does occur: there is no geographical transplantation”.

According to Kuhn, in a period of normal science, scientists function within a framework of a certain **paradigm**, that is, within a framework of established and socially accepted views, ways of arriving at

solutions to scientific problems (scientific methods), cultivated and validated principles and rules of conducting scientific research. As stated by Kuhn, the term is supposed to “suggest that some accepted examples of actual scientific practice – examples which include law, theory, application, and instrumentation together – provide models from which spring particular coherent traditions of scientific research” (ibid., p. 10). A scientific revolution means a departure from a paradigm and its replacement with a new one. A revolution leads to a change of standards and values, a change in the manner of perceiving the world, resulting in the discerning of new elements of the world, not previously researched.

The **social and psychological origin** of a paradigm is an extremely important issue. A paradigm—as a prevalent manner of practicing science—emerges from among various visions, approaches, traditions, ideas, or concepts, as at a certain time, most scientists consider certain assumptions or scientific methods as correct and exemplary. As a particular paradigm becomes recognized as applicable and valid, it is accompanied by a social process of its validation, inheritance, and scientific socialization of the next generation of scientists, which occurs in the course of research work acquiring education. The period of validity of a specific paradigm is therefore relatively stable and isolated from external influences. As Kuhn claims, any external interferences come to the fore only during phases of revolutionary changes.

And so, in a period of the prevalence of a particular paradigm, there occurs a more or less conscious internalization of certain rules of conduct in science, of practicing it in a certain way, in the image and likeness of shared manners of perceiving and analyzing reality. A researcher can even be completely unaware of their entanglement in a generally accepted system of philosophical and methodological principles. Sometimes, paradigms remain deeply hidden; they are silently assumed and treated as obvious by many. Moreover, a researcher may be unaware of the existence of different ways of perceiving and studying the world, which often causes their indifference, incomprehension, or even lack of acceptance for other research orientations—and consequently, hinders and sometimes also prevents cooperation of scientists within a single scientific discipline (cf. Kostera 2007).

A paradigm contains a certain immanent contradiction concerning its **utility**. On the one hand, functioning within a framework of a specific paradigm in a way frees scientists from the need to ponder over the philosophical assumptions concerning the world and the bases of scientific activity which justify and legitimize their actions. This characteristic determines the power of a paradigm—it is useful, because it enables activities and orients the research effort toward the execution and effects of various scientific projects. As Kuhn puts it (1970, p. 19), “[w]hen the individual scientist can take a paradigm for granted, he need no longer, in his major works, attempt to build his field anew, starting from first principles and justifying the use of each concept introduced. That can be left to the writer of textbooks. Given a textbook, however, the creative scientist can begin his research where it leaves off and thus concentrate exclusively upon the subtlest and most esoteric aspects of the natural phenomena that concern his group”. Yet, on the other hand, the property of the aforesaid paradigm causes the action to be disconnected from the motives which determine and explain the shape or course of scientific activity; the power to judge one’s own conduct remains outside the area of direct interest of an unreflective researcher executing research projects. Scientific activity devoid of this critical element is barely different, if at all, from the work of an advisor or analyst.

As mentioned, a paradigm includes a certain specific set of philosophical assumptions. The following sections explain which “areas” of scientific activity these assumptions concern, thus answering the question of what basic “components” a paradigm is built of.

2.3 The Structure of Paradigms

2.3.1 Ontological Assumptions, that is Assumptions Concerning the Nature of Social Reality

Ontology is the basic field of philosophy concentrated around the problem of existence. As Ted Benton and Ian Craib (2010) put it, “ontology” is the answer given to the question of what kinds of things exist in the

world. The authors point out that in the history of philosophy, four primary traditions in settling this question can be distinguished: materialism, idealism, dualism, and agnosticism. **Materialists** claim that the world is made entirely of matter and the diversity of the features of material objects, living beings—including people, societies, and other beings may be explained in the categories of lower or higher structural complexity of matter. **Idealists** believe that the ultimate reality is of mental or spiritual nature—all beings are the creations of our own internal thought processes. **Dualism** recognizes the separation of the spirit and body, assuming that two interpenetrating worlds exist. And so human beings appear as combinations of a mechanical body and a spiritual mind or soul. Finally, the **agnostic** tradition assumes that it is impossible to discover the nature of the world existing independently of subjective experience (dualism).

As we can see from the descriptions presented above, the essence of the discussion concerns the issue of the **reality of beings**. In reference to ontological assumptions, according to **realism**, something exists “objectively”, that is, independently of the human mind. Therefore, ontological realism recognizes that something real exists, that this something actually does exist. In science, this position assumes that the beings and structures referred to in scientific theories exist in some external space, which makes it possible to study, analyze, and learn about them (Heller 2011). From an extreme perspective, sometimes described as “naive realism”, it is assumed that in reality, only beings recognized by science exist; only science presents the objective truth about the world (cf. Heller 2011). Extreme realism toward certain universal beings considers them as independent of individuals (e.g. in agnosticism), while moderate realism—as dependent on them. The opposite of realism is the assumption that there is no external, objectively observable and distinguishable structure of a social world. This world consists only of names, concepts, meanings, and terms created and used by people to describe reality. This is why the only thing we can study is the ideas and creations of our minds, not some independent external beings governed by specific laws. It is not difficult to notice that these assumptions are close to idealists, hence this type of view is called **idealism**.

2.3.2 Epistemological Assumptions, that is Assumptions Concerning the Nature of Scientific Cognition

Epistemology is the field of philosophy dealing with cognition and knowledge. Its name comes from Greek *ēpistemē*, which means “knowledge”. In literature, one may also encounter the name **theory of knowledge** (Benton and Craib 2010). The fundamental issues of epistemology include the question of the sources of human cognition, the question about the role of experience in the creation of knowledge, the participation of reason in this phenomenon, the problem of the relationship between knowledge and certainty, and other detailed problems concentrated around the issue of the nature of truth, the nature of experience, and the nature of meaning (Woleński 2004).

In seventeenth-century discussions of philosophy and science, there were two main alternative and mutually exclusive views on the nature of cognition. The first one was characterized by a “rationalist” approach, recognizing the primacy of human reason. Its supporters were under the strong influence of mathematics, in which absolutely certain conclusions were reached by way of formal reasoning. The famous Cartesian “*Cogito ergo sum*” is an example of a statement which, as a result of pure work of the mind—systematically doubting everything—led its author to a reconstruction of the entire edifice of knowledge. The alternative (so-called auxiliary) model was “empiricism”. Representatives of this current saw the only source of knowledge about the world in sensory experience. At the moment of birth, the human mind is a blank slate which is filled with experiences during life. This “filling” consists in recognizing and accepting repeatable patterns to which some general ideas are attached. Knowledge is nothing other than isolating these patterns in human experience, and the conclusions drawn from them (Benton and Craib 2010). As eminent experts on the subject claim, currently, a turn in epistemology toward empiricism, that is, a departure from its purely rational version, can be observed (cf.; Hetmański 2008; Sintonen et al. 2004). It is the most intuitive approach to cognition, closest to the common sense of most people. To see, to touch, to smell—means to believe.

It can be concluded that the essence of the debate at the level of epistemological assumptions lies in invoking a certain opposition concerning orientation toward explaining and predicting events in the social world by searching for regularities, laws, and permanent relationships between its elements (variables) (Burrell and Morgan 1985). One of the views is the adoption of a traditional approach of natural sciences in the domain of the social sciences. Making this choice, it should be assumed that knowledge grows in a cumulative manner, and the process consists in adding successive portions of certain and reliable knowledge by way of verification or falsification of new scientific hypotheses. From an extremely opposite point of view, there is no such thing as generally applicable laws regulating the course of social events. Social reality is in its essence relativist and may be explored only in a limited way by attempting to understand it from the point of view of the individuals who experience it. In accordance with this assumption, one should reject the possibility of objective cognition of the social world and adopt the thesis about the multitude of social realities (cf. Schütz 1972), which may be understood only by stepping into the shoes of a participant of the events under analysis. Science is not able to generate any objective knowledge and it is naturally subjectivist.

One of the more interesting ideas making it possible to understand and show the practical application of epistemological assumptions is the concept of **epistemological metaphor** used by the recognized theoretician of organization and management, Gareth Morgan (1980, 1981, 1983, 2006). As Monika Kostera (1996) puts it, Morgan treats research as a kind of involvement in the world, and this is why he proposes setting scientific methods in a broader philosophical context. Metaphor is the expression of the epistemological position of a person designing and conducting research, according to which the ways of perceiving, explaining, and understanding the world recognized by them are more appropriate and valid than others. According to Morgan (2006), we use metaphor whenever we attempt to understand one element of an experience in terms of another. Thanks to metaphors, people “read” reality, express what would otherwise be difficult or impossible to express. “A memorable metaphor has the power to bring two separate domains into cognitive

and emotional relation by using language directly appropriate to the one as a lens for seeing the other” (Black 1962, p. 236, as cited in: McCloskey 1983, p. 503).

If we examine metaphor only on the linguistic level, it is nothing other than an analogy, a figure of speech, based on the association of two phenomena and transferring the name of one phenomenon to the other. However, this aspect of metaphor has little value from the point of view of its use in social research. Much more important consequences emerge when metaphor is understood as an internalized form belonging to the sphere of the human psyche, when it is recognized as the basic structural form of experiencing the world. According to Morgan, it is this aspect of metaphor that is of the greatest significance, as it makes it an instrument with which people experience reality, function in it, try to understand, and describe it. The author clearly points it out, among others in the introduction to his book, *Images of Organisation*. In Morgan’s opinion, our theories and explanations of organizational life are based on metaphors that lead us to see and understand organizations in distinctive yet partial ways. Metaphor is often just regarded as a device for embellishing discourse, but its significance is much greater than this. The use of metaphor implies a “way of thinking” and a “way of seeing” that pervade how we understand our world generally.

2.3.3 Methodologies

Methodology is treated here as a set of certain choices concerning the way in which a given phenomenon can be studied. David Silverman (2005) thinks that methodologies may be defined broadly and schematically (e.g. methodologies of qualitative and quantitative research) or narrowly and precisely (e.g. the methodology of grounded theory, case analysis, ethnography). In his opinion, a methodology refers to the choices we make about cases to study, methods of data gathering, forms of data analysis, and so on, in planning and executing a research study. So our methodology defines how one goes about studying any phenomenon.

Methodologies are therefore practical ways of learning about the world using various methods of collecting and analyzing quantitative and/or qualitative data. They result from the assumptions, adopted by the researcher more or less consciously, on the nature of the social world and the concept of exploring it. They are therefore a derivative of philosophical assumptions—ontological and epistemological. If, for example, we assume that social reality is of objective nature and can be explored by way of isolating structures and interrelationships between observable manifestations of the phenomenon under study existing outside, then, in conducting research, we will strive to specify the measures of the given phenomenon (variables), the manner of collecting data about the variables (e.g. in the form of a questionnaire or a postal survey), the scale and scope of our activities (selection of the sampling frame and research sample), and the ways of analyzing the collected quantitative material.

Burrell and Morgan (1985) believe that debates conducted in the area of the methodology of social research oscillate around two alternative models of scientific conduct, being a consequence of the choices made at earlier levels of philosophical assumptions—that is, ontological and epistemological. The authors also point out the relationship between methodology and the objectives of social research, and treating as science either ideographic or nomothetic. The first approach—close to the humanist orientation in social research—is based on the conviction that one can only understand the social world by obtaining first-hand information which the participants of events have. Hence the need to come as close as possible to the subject under investigation, analyze the background, context, and history is emphasized here. In ideographic models, it is important to capture the nature of the given phenomenon and create the most complete possible description of that phenomenon by concentrating on details, properties, characteristics, and an in-depth case analysis. The essence of the **nomothetic** approach is to capture the properties of the phenomenon under research which are common, repeatable, and significant for all the cases analyzed. In this type of explanation, the need to control the research process by following established procedures and techniques is emphasized. It is important to maintain the scientific rigor adapted from the natural sciences, which is intended to guarantee objectivity of judgment. Methodologies used to execute tasks of this type use

all kinds of standardized methods and instruments of data collection and analysis (e.g. surveys, interview questionnaires, tests).

What are the methodologies of qualitative research characterized by? Monika Kostera (2007) writes that qualitative research strives to achieve as accurate a description as possible of a fragment of social reality undisturbed by the researcher. It is aimed at *understanding*, enlightening, and potentially extrapolating the results to similar situations. Research of this type makes it possible to build comprehensive knowledge—that is, presenting phenomena in their natural context. Knowledge, resulting from qualitative researchers' investigations, is close to the perspective of social actors, it is an attempt at representing the way in which social actors understand reality, what the motives and manners of their actions are. Qualitative methodologies are inductive by nature; they primarily use an idiographic style of explanation.

Matthew Miles and A. Michael Huberman (1994) created a list of qualitative research characteristics recurring in the literature. Among them, the authors name the following:

- Qualitative research is characterized by intense and long-lasting contact with a “field” or life situation which is usually normal; that is, it is a reflection of people's everyday life.
- Researchers try to present the data on the observations of local social actors in a holistic manner, in a way “from the inside”, by understanding and suspending (leaving aside) predetermined opinions and judgments.
- From the very beginning of the research process, researchers use research tools which are not overly standardized, taking the active role of formulating questions or the scope of observations, interviews, and analyses upon themselves.

Among the most common, and at the same time the best described methodologies of qualitative research, the following are listed: various versions of grounded theory, ethnographic research, case analysis, focus studies, action research, discourse analysis, critical studies, feminist studies, and the narrative approach.

2.4 Types of Paradigms in Social Sciences

2.4.1 Two Dimensions and Four Paradigms: The Classification of Gibson Burrell and Gareth Morgan (1985)

One of the better-known classifications of paradigms in social sciences was developed over 30 years ago by Gibson Burrell and Gareth Morgan (1985). Using two dimensions from the analysis of the assumptions underlying various social theories, the authors created a matrix of four key paradigms. The first dimension—subjectivism-objectivism—refers to the discussion on the nature of social sciences. The second one—regulation-radical change—concerns the dispute on the nature of society.

The **subjectivism-objectivism** dimension was distinguished as a result of an analysis of the bases of the main debates conducted in the area of ontological, epistemological, and methodological assumptions. The authors of the discussed concept assumed that the approach to practicing science presented by scientists is a sequence of consistent and internally coherent choices within the indicated levels of philosophical assumptions. Adopting specific assumptions about the social reality leads to favoring an adequate form of the theory of cognition, the concept of man, and the practical path of conducting research.

According to the authors, two alternative approaches are possible in social sciences. The first one—**objectivist**—in its purest form assumes that the nature of reality is hard, verifiable, external, and objective (realism). Scientific cognition consists in the analysis of repeatable patterns and relationships between elements of the phenomena under study (nomothetic science), which are primal in relation to the actions of individuals, groups, and communities (social determinism). In order to discover the universal laws governing the social world, one needs to isolate and measure specific variables and the interrelationships between them, using quantitative (statistical) methods.

The second approach—**subjectivist**—emphasizes the primacy of individual experience in the creation of social reality (idealism). In order to

understand people and the way in which they act, one needs to come as close as possible to the subject under study, capture and describe how people create their unique worlds while remaining free and, in principle, the primary creators of social reality. Research here is based on an acceptance of the relativist nature of the world and strives to provide the most complete possible description of the analyzed phenomena in order to explore them in depth (ideographic studies; analytic induction).

The **regulation-radical change** dimension, as we mentioned earlier, refers to the issue of the nature of society. Based on an analysis of sociological theories, Burrell and Morgan introduce their own categories, distinguishing *the sociology of radical change* and *the sociology of regulation*. The former is created on the basis of a conviction that man strives to free himself from structures which limit his development potential. Focusing on the conflict-generating nature of interrelationships in society, its representatives aim to point out and explain the existing differences, divisions, and dominances of certain social layers or classes over others. The sociology of regulation on the other hand includes the works of those theoreticians who, first and foremost, strive to present society in categories of unity and coherence. This branch of sociology aims to answer the question of why societies last as single beings.

Burrell and Morgan claim that their distinction of regulation-radical change may serve as an outline of the analysis of social theories. In their opinion, in connection with the subjectivism-objectivism dimension, it constitutes a powerful tool for the identification and analysis of the assumptions underlying all scientific theories. Juxtaposing both dimensions, the authors distinguished four basic paradigms in social sciences: functionalism, interpretivism, radical structuralism, and radical humanism.

The authors of the concept claim that individual paradigms—in spite of the fact that they come into contact with each other—should be perceived as completely distinct from each other. The basis for this distinctness is the irreconcilable assumptions which underlie them. Burrell and Morgan assume that all theoreticians dealing with social analysis may be placed within the presented paradigms. At the same time, they believe that, as with any map, this one also is a tool which shows the current location of the researcher, but also their previous and future locations.

Moreover, it is possible to take various positions within a single paradigm. Below, we present a short description of the paradigms distinguished by Burrell and Morgan.

Functionalism is an approach which dominated the social sciences for a long time. Its representatives perceive society in categories of integrity, invariability, unity, order, *status quo*, searching for universal laws and the reasons for the coherent nature of social reality. The functionalist paradigm is deeply embedded in positivist literature, recognizing the reality and the objective nature of the social world. Functionalists are pragmatists searching for knowledge which is useful and which may serve the purpose of predicting and controlling social processes by providing practical solutions in response to practical problems. This approach assumes that the social world consists of relatively permanent and concrete, empirically available elements, as well as relationships and structures which may be identified, analyzed, and measured using methods borrowed from the natural sciences. In many functionalist theories, comparisons straight from mechanics or biology are used to describe the phenomena under research. Functionalism is based above all on quantitative methods and analyses.

The **interpretive paradigm** in its essence corresponds to the understanding or humanist approach described above. It is deeply embedded in the subjectivist vision of social nature and the theory of cognition. This perspective is oriented toward understanding reality in the form in which it is perceived by its participants (social actors). It searches for explanations by referring to the consciousness, experience, beliefs, and ideas of people who constantly construct and reconstruct their actions. The social world is treated as a continuously emerging and changing social process created by individuals; it is a creation of human minds, a network of assumptions and intersubjectively shared meanings. Researchers from this current focus on everyday life, trying to understand reality, interpreting the social phenomena which occur around them. The interpretive paradigm draws on the assumptions of the sociology of regulation—contrary to appearances, the issues of conflict, domination, and change are not in the center of interest of the researchers of this trend. Rather, they search for explanations concerning the way in which the world is constructed in the everyday activities of social actors.

Radical structuralism at the level of basic philosophical assumptions refers to objectivism and the sociology of radical change. Representatives of this orientation focus on structural relationships within the objectively available reality. They stress that radical change is an inherent part of the nature and structure of the contemporary world. Hence in the center of interest of radical structuralists lie the issues of power, domination, and deeply embedded internal contradictions and disputes. Researchers' activity is not only oriented toward pure description and cognition of these phenomena, but also plays the role of raising society's awareness of the not always fair interrelationships between various individuals and groups. Therefore, science strives to propose ways for unprivileged individuals and groups to free themselves from the domination of others.

Postmodernism, similar to the interpretive paradigm, is based on the conviction that the social world is not a material and objectively available reality, but a product of human minds. A distinctive feature of this approach is perceiving the world in the categories of invalidating social limitations and moving beyond them. One of the fundamental assumptions underlying this orientation is the view that human consciousness is dominated by an ideological superstructure with which man is constantly interacting, and which constitutes a kind of cognitive wedge placed between him and his true consciousness. The existence of this wedge brings alienation; it causes us to deal with "false consciousness", which makes it impossible for us to find fulfilment. The task of this science is to raise awareness of the existence of these cognitive limitations by exposing the false traps of the collective consciousness and freeing the human mind from them, which is intended to lead to self-fulfilment and development of individuals. Society is therefore seen as oriented against man, and radical humanists aim at searching and communicating the ways in which various limitations are imposed on people.

2.4.2 Five Basic Paradigms: The Concept of Egon Guba and Yvonna Lincoln (2005)

Another example of a classification of paradigms in social sciences, with particular consideration given to qualitative research, is the study of Egon

Guba and Yvonna Lincoln (2005) published in *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research*. It presents the authors' proposal for five basic research orientations—updated compared to the first one dating back to 1994. While strongly encouraging everyone to read the above-mentioned publication, only a short and concise description shall be presented here.

The authors analyzed the axiomatic nature of paradigms, referring to three fundamental levels of philosophical assumptions—ontology, epistemology, and methodology. As a result, they distinguished the following paradigms: positivism, postpositivism, critical theory, constructivism, and the participatory paradigm, added in 2000.

Positivism, which we mentioned before, at the ontological level refers to the realistic concept of social reality. It therefore assumes the existence of an objective world, external to the person conducting research; in it, that person searches for laws, rules, and repeatable patterns of activity isolated from a non-significant context. With reference to epistemological assumptions, positivism assumes dualism and objectivism. It is possible to maintain the attitude of an external observer and thus eliminate the influence of values, opinions, and subjective beliefs. The aim of the research is to explain, predict, and control the social phenomena under study. Knowledge, which grows in a cumulative manner, is gathered by way of verification of hypotheses, establishing facts and laws. The methodology is characterized by an experimental approach, with the use of quantitative methods in order to verify the truth of the judgments given.

Postpositivism is a slightly “weaker” version of positivism. In the area of ontological assumptions, it is characterized by critical realism—recognizing the objective nature of reality while assuming that due to the limitations of human senses, it can only be understood in an imperfect way and somewhat approximately. Postpositivists consider the aim of their inquiries to be prediction and control, yet in the area of epistemology, they use a modified version of dualism/objectivism. They find, above all, that it is impossible to completely eliminate the influence of the researcher on the phenomenon under study, but one should aim to reduce it as much as possible. Conducting research, one

should also—in reference to the “critical tradition” of scientific research—realize as accurately as possible in what way the research was conducted by subjecting its results and the manner of arriving at these results to the critical evaluation of the scientific community. In the methodological layer, postpositivism assumes critical pluralism, which says that since the human mind has limitations (critical realism), one should aim to diversify the sources and types of data, using various theories, methods, and researchers. So the point is to make active use of the so-called triangulation. Hence in the methodological layer, it is also acceptable to use qualitative methods, even though the quantitative approach is predominant.

Critical theory also borrows the acceptance of the objectivist vision of the world from the natural sciences, yet in the area of epistemology, it presents a subjectivist position, definitely closer to the reality under study. Historical realism—as this is how the authors call it—is characterized by the assumption that reality is shaped by social, political, cultural, economic, ethnic, and other values. The aim of research here is to explain, but also to raise people’s awareness of a certain ideological grounding from which one may free oneself in the direction of “true, non-falsified consciousness”. Therefore in this case, the reality of beings and the existence of some objective truth is assumed, while at the same time it is recognized that the sociocultural grounding of human actions plays an important role and, in order to explore it, one should refer to people’s experience. While in the case of previous paradigms, the researcher took on the role of an uninvolved person focused on providing information to those responsible for introducing changes, in the area of critical theory the researcher is perceived as a spokesperson and activist transforming data so that it becomes comprehensible to the recipient and presenting the position and context of events of the community under study. The methodology is therefore described as dialogic or dialectical, oriented toward debunking false beliefs by reaching them with the use of qualitative and quantitative research, the knowledge of history, the meaning of values, and knowledge of what incapacitation is and what direction the emancipation, liberation, or rehabilitation of individuals should take.

Constructivism in the ontological layer shares the subjectivist attitude toward reality, accepting relativism, that is, the existence of many locally constructed and reconstructed realities. It assumes the existence of various social worlds, functioning above all in human minds, and not as objectively available, common external structures. Some scholars emphasize, however, that constructivism has many variations, and some of them also function in the realist “camp”. It is sufficient to assume that certain reconstructions are of a collective nature and assume the shape of an agreement or consensus, thanks to which something becomes something by virtue of shared meanings and ways of understanding the given phenomenon. At the level of epistemological assumptions, constructivists accept subjectivism. In their opinion, it is impossible to separate the researcher from their beliefs and values. Moreover, as realities exist only in human minds and social worlds keep being constructed and reconstructed, the only way of learning about them is to refer to the subjective experience, opinions, beliefs, and values of their creators. And so the researcher assumes the role of “participant”, whom Guba and Lincoln call the “facilitator of multi-voice reconstruction”. Methodologies are oriented at interpreting meanings, so they are hermeneutical and dialectical in nature. The point is, on the one hand, to bring out certain individual constructs and subject them to interpretation, and on the other, to compare and contrast individual meanings in order to generate one or more shared constructs. Various data sources are used—mainly qualitative, but also quantitative methods and data. The context of events is important.

The participatory paradigm, or the paradigm based on cooperation, at the ontological level recognizes the subjective-objective nature of reality. As explained by John Heron (1996, p. 11), one of the authors of the approach discussed here, reality is subjective, because it is available only in the form in which the human mind presents it. At the same time, it is objective, because a certain given reality, or as Heron puts it, cosmos, that is, a specific harmonious whole, is available to the human mind. Reality is therefore co-created by the mind and the given cosmos. Epistemology assumes interaction, participation in the exchanges between the knower and the known. The roles are interchangeable—the known is also a knower, for we should remember that we are dealing with the social

world, not nature. The nature of knowing is practical, participative. Mutual cognition is partial and open to change. At the methodological level, forms of research which fit in the given reality in the practical, conceptual, empathic, and imaginal sense are adopted. Inquiring requires the ability to recognize and build an intersubjective space grounded in a given cultural context. Research based on cooperation is founded on the use of language located in shared experience. The researcher has to have (and they are educated accordingly) emotional competence and a democratic personality, and be actively involved in the given reality.

2.5 Conclusions: Who Needs Knowledge About Paradigms in Social Sciences?

As Normal Denzin and Yvonna Lincoln (2005) claim, the contemporary researcher cannot afford not to know any of the paradigms and perspectives currently practiced in the social sciences. In their opinion, scholars need to understand the basic ethical, ontological, epistemological, and methodological assumptions of paradigms and be able to enter into a dialogue with them. According to the authors, the differences between paradigms have significant and important implications at the practical, everyday, empirical level. To know the basics of the philosophy of social sciences is therefore a duty of every well-educated person dealing with social research. But is it solely a duty? The authors mention the translatability of theoretical perspectives into practical actions. How should we interpret this?

The answer to this question is given, among others, by Ted Benton and Ian Craib (2010), who discuss the “auxiliary” role of philosophy in social sciences. In their opinion, in the auxiliary model, philosophy should provide guidelines and support to the researchers who study the reality around them. This support may be provided in at least three ways:

- Assuming that in our thinking there is bias, prejudice, and indiscriminate assumptions which constitute an obstacle to the progress of science, the role of philosophy may consist in exposing and criticizing them.

- Philosophy may also outline a map presenting the state of scientific knowledge which will make it possible for specialists in individual domains to work out their position in the field of knowledge.
- Finally, philosophers may use their abilities—above all their expertise in logic and argumentation—to perfect research methodologies and methods.

Philosophy is not just an academic discipline. Every person experiences difficult moments in life, when they ponder over fundamental values and principles that guide their actions. At the same time, each of us deals with philosophy in a sense also when we settle the basic problems of everyday life, for example, analyzing our relationships with people and our influence on others, choosing how we spend our free time, or deciding on a job or other activities.

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