D’Après Bourdieu

“Max Weber (1978) reminds us that, in the art of warfare, the greatest progress originated not in technical inventions but in transformations of the social organization of the warriors, as for instance in the case of the invention of the Macedonian phalanx. One may, along the same line, ask whether a transformation of the social organization of scientific production and circulation and, in particular, of the forms of communication and exchange through which logical and empirical control is carried out would not be capable of contributing to the progress of scientific reason in sociology—and to do so more powerfully than the refinement of new technologies of measurement or the endless warnings and ‘presuppositional’ discussions of epistemologists and methodologists. I have in mind here a scientific politique—that is, policy and politics—whose goal would be to foster scientific communication and debate across the many divisions associated with rational traditions and with the fragmentation of social science into empirical subspecialties, theoretical paradigms, and methodological schools.”


While the issue addressed here is general, we make it tangible by talking specifically about the field of sociology.

After the Second World War sociology grew dramatically, and by the late 1970s the number of sociologists increased more than five-fold. At the same time, sociology also divided itself into a large number of regional and methodological sub-specialties. The result is a paradox: The consequence of this large increase in allocated resources is that our society no longer has the sociology to inform it about its problems.

In early 1980s a conference was organized by two leading sociologists, European Pierre Bourdieu and American James Coleman, to explore the possibility of bridging the dividing lines and putting the sociology back together. This conference resulted in the book “On the Possibility of a Field of World Sociology”. In the epilog to this book, Bourdieu voiced the above appeal, emphasizing that “the progress of scientific reason in sociology hinges crucially on a transformation of the social organization of scientific production and communication.”

It is not difficult to see that this fragmentation of knowledge is at least in part due to the printed text as medium, and book and article publishing as the manner of distribution. New Internet technology, notably Topic Maps and wikis, give us the possibility to complete Bourdieu’s project, by developing entirely different modalities and media for creation and distribution of knowledge. We postulate that, when technology makes this possible, it will be the task of sociology, and indeed of any other knowledge-making community, to organize and structure their knowledge and knowledge production internally, and to make their essential findings accessible to the larger community in a suitable form.

According to Bourdieu, such transformation of the social organization of scientific production and circulation and, in particular, of the forms of communication and exchange through which logical and empirical control is carried out, may lead to “greatest progress.”

The goal of our D’Après Bourdieu project is to create the theoretical and technical tools that are required for this manner of working, and to develop a prototype instance of its practice within an academic community.

(Dino Karabeg, dino.karabeg@ifi.uio.no)