

## SOCIAL AND POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY



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### Society as a Self-Developing System: the Socio-Synergetic Aspect of Research

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#### Abstract

**Introduction.** The current state of the theory of synergetic paradigm influencing the development of society is under investigation. The aim of the article is to consider society as a complexly organised, open system developing according to non-linear laws.

**Materials and methods.** The object of the study is society. Society is understood as a social system that forms a single social whole. In the process of research, general philosophical principles and methods, principles of consistency, synergy and axiology are used.

**Results.** According to the authors, Synergetics is a new, rapidly developing area, attracting a large number of scientists from various fields of scientific knowledge with its worldview perspectives. This attraction is created by the breadth of the subject of Synergetics itself, its interdisciplinary nature, the content of its methodology, and its universal language.

**Discussion and conclusion.** Being a holistic, complex phenomenon, society requires that it should be viewed as a social system and provide an appropriate systemic approach to its study. This is most characteristic of the synergetic approach. We can say that, in fact, the theory of self-organization represents a fundamentally new methodological basis for the study of modern society and all its systems. It is based on the assertion that any society has alternative paths of development and the possibility to choose them. Synergetics opens up new principles of building complex developing systems of society from simple ones, helps to understand the nature of their interconnection, interaction and mutual influence.

**Keywords:** Synergetics, self-organisation theory, bifurcation branching, historical fluctuations, civilisational development, evolutionary model, social system.

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Original article



Научная статья

### Общество как саморазвивающаяся система: социально-синергетический аспект исследования

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#### Аннотация

**Введение.** Исследуется современное состояние теории синергетической парадигмы, влияющей на развитие общества. Цель статьи — рассмотреть общество в качестве сложноорганизованной, открытой системы, развивающейся по нелинейным законам.

**Материалы и методы.** Объектом исследования является общество. Общество понимается как социальная система, образующее единое социальное целое. В процессе исследования используются общеполитические принципы и методы, принципы системности, синергии, аксиологии.

**Результаты исследования.** По мнению авторов, синергетика — это новое, быстро развивающееся направление, привлекающее большое число ученых из самых разных областей научного знания своими мировоззренческими перспективами. Эту привлекательность создают широта самого предмета синергетики, её междисциплинарный характер, содержание её методологии, универсальный язык.

**Обсуждение и заключение.** Общество, являясь целостным, сложным явлением, обуславливает необходимость рассматривать его как социальную систему и обеспечивать соответствующий системный подход к его изучению. Это наиболее характерно для синергетического подхода. Можно сказать, что по сути теория самоорганизации представляет собой принципиально новую методологическую основу для изучения современного общества и всех его систем. В основе ее утверждение — любое общество имеет альтернативные пути развития и возможность их выбора. Синергетика открывает новые принципы построения сложных развивающихся систем общества из простых систем, помогает понять характер их взаимосвязи, взаимодействия и взаимовлияния.

**Ключевые слова:** синергетика, теория самоорганизации, бифуркационное разветвление, исторические флуктуации, цивилизационное развитие, эволюционная модель, социальная система.

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**Introduction.** Self-organisation theory is essentially a fundamentally new methodological framework for the study of modern society and all its systems. According to it, any society has alternative paths of development and the possibility of choosing them. The present state of society is not only determined by its past, by its history, but it is also constructed, formed based on the future, in accordance with the coming order. Social practice, the intensive development of modern society, all its systems, the regular emergence of new ones, objectively require a more thorough study of theoretical and methodological approaches to these processes.

In its most general form, society is a group, an association of people. This means, first, that, just as humans with their consciousness and corresponding behaviour are fundamentally different from animals (including highly organised humanoid apes, anthropoids) and their behaviour, so the latter's herd cannot, from a scientific, including sociological, point of view, be identified with society, despite some outward similarities.

**Materials and methods.** The theoretical and methodological basis of the study consists of general philosophical principles and methods, the principles of consistency, synergy and axiology.

**Results.** Society is not any mechanical group of people, but an association of people in which there is more or less constant, sustained and sufficiently close interplay and interaction between people. In a narrower sense, when referring, for example, to Russian, American, Japanese or French society, society refers to a particular kind of society with all its historical, socio-cultural and other characteristics.

With this very understanding of society in mind, the famous contemporary American scientist N. Smelzer defines society as “an association of people that has certain geographical boundaries, a common legislative system and a certain national (socio-cultural) identity” [1, p. 437], which is based on real presence in human consciousness, promotes “dialogue of cultures in the context of the development of modern civilization” [2], “provides the education of a positive attitude towards cultural differences” [3, pp. 7–10].

Society is heterogeneous and has its own internal structure and composition, including a large number of differently ordered and differently characterised social phenomena and processes.

Thus, society as a social system is understood as a large ordered set of social phenomena and processes, which are more or less closely interrelated and interact with each other and form a single social whole.

**Discussion and conclusion.** The complexity, versatility and at the same time the integrity of such a phenomenon as society make it necessary to consider it as a social system (at that in its most general and complex form) and to provide an appropriate (systemic) approach to its study. This is most characteristic of the synergetic approach. In fact, self-

organization theory is a fundamentally new methodological basis for the study of modern society and all its systems. According to it, any society has alternative paths of development and the possibility to choose them.

The present state of society is not only determined by its past, by its history, but it is also constructed, shaped from the future, according to the coming order. The significance of Synergetics consists mainly in seeking answers to global questions of the world order, which is the field of activity of philosophy. “Philosophical reflection gives meaning, purpose, forms to the educational concept, and performs an integrative function” [4].

The study of society as a system involves identifying its structures or subsystems. Open systems are those that exchange matter and energy with the outside world. They have sources and sinks of energy. The range of open systems is unusually wide. Non-linearity in Synergetics means multivariate or alternative development paths and the consequent irreversibility of processes.

The idea of self-organisation is revealed through the mechanism of spontaneous emergence, relatively stable existence and self-destruction of macroscopic structures through mechanisms of transition from chaos to order and vice versa.

Considering society as such a system, Synergetics argues that it is open to development, i.e. it is not yet, but becoming, not simply existing, but continuously emerging, capable of being defined by “...activities that imitate real reality...”. [5]. Society evolves according to non-linear laws. The latter means that society is full of unexpected twists and turns related to the choice of further development.

Based on the universal laws of self-organisation, we can conclude that it is impossible to impose a development path and goal on a particular society. It is more important to understand how to promote its own development tendencies and how to put it on a certain path. This way of thinking fundamentally changes the approach to managing the development of society, where the result of the impact was unambiguous and linear, and the consequence was equal to the efforts made.

The theory of self-organisation helps to understand the complex process of shaping fundamentally new organisational structures of society out of chaos with the help of its own internal forces. Through chaos, the connection of different levels of organisation is carried out; at appropriate moments, instable ones, small perturbations, fluctuations can grow into macrostructures.

It follows, in particular, that the efforts and actions of a single individual are not in vain. In special states of social environment instability, an individual’s actions can influence macrosocial processes.

Synergetics opens up new principles for the construction of complex evolving systems of society. Their unification is not reduced to simple addition, i. e. they form a complex field as if overlapping the areas of localisation of these systems. The principles of their interconnection and interdependence become more complex, and a new principle of harmonising the parts into a whole emerges. Different systems of society, various levels of their development and states seem to coexist in the same social space. The understanding of these principles allows us to develop correct approaches to the construction of a complex social integrity, which society is.

The synergetic question of the birth of order out of chaos, self-organization in society correlates with the basic sociological problem of the birth of spontaneous general sociological patterns (historical determinism) and the free will of individuals, which includes “the formation and interaction of ethno-cultural traditions ...”. [6]. It has become an axiom that the general historical trends are formed independently of the will of individual people acting in history.

The birth of a new social order is associated with the breaking of the original spatiotemporal symmetry. First, a temporal heterogeneity emerges, one of the possible historical paths of social system development becomes preferable. Secondly, a new spatial heterogeneity emerges, a new social hierarchy emerges, i.e. a certain social structure whose centre becomes the new faces of history: leaders, elites, social groups. The former social leaders move to the periphery of preference or undergo a significant transformation.

Another crucial synergetic aspect of social development is the introduction of the factor of historical unpredictability in transitional bifurcation epochs, which can disrupt the consistently linear course of events. This opens the way to an understanding of the alternatives of history, since at the points of historical fracture, thanks to the purposeful will of historical actors, a choice is made from a spectrum of possibilities: either the social system will generate a new configuration of forces (a new social order), or will concentrate on maintaining the previous order, or will continue to maintain its instability until a new bifurcation branching off.

The consideration of social systems as open, capable of effectively processing the flow of external influences and sources of development (whether natural resources, capital flows, new technologies, cultural and informational innovations) expands the ideas about the driving forces of social self-organization, capable of initiating the impetus to

the system's self-complexity, to accelerate the pace of its development, the irregularity of historical development. Here the constructive role of chaos as the ability of the social system to form the innovative potential contained in the flow of historical fluctuations is clearly visible.

The idea of non-linearity of the social environment as the most important condition of its self-organisation appears as an explaining reason of the diversity of historical development, both in evolutionary terms (coexistence of social systems with different levels of civilisation development) and in multicultural terms (diversity of social systems with a close evolutionary model).

The picture of social self-organisation implies recognition of the thesis of a necessary cyclical alternation of modes of behaviour of the social system — order-building structures and order-preserving structures, "...determining the nature of relations in the socio-cultural environment" [9]. Society, as an open system, can exist only in such a pulsating state. The disequilibrium makes it very sensitive to fluctuations (both internal and external), which create a field of variations to choose the future path of development.

When considering the principles of self-organization of society, one cannot ignore the fact that social systems differ significantly from natural systems in a number of ways. As G. I. Ruzavin points out, the fundamental difference is that in social systems "self-organization is complemented by organization, because people act in society, gifted with creation, setting themselves certain goals, guided by motives of their behavior and values" [10, p. 66]. Therefore, it should be borne in mind that the functioning and development of society is not exclusively in accordance with the principles of synergy, but also with other, non-synergetic laws. In a real social system they complement each other.

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