

Structuration theory

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- Social theory
- Relates to the creation and reproduction of social systems
- Based in the analysis of both “structure” and “agents” (see [structure and agency](#)):
- Abstract characteristics of social relations
- Structuration focuses on structure rather than production
- Agents as active participants.
- It was proposed by [sociologist Anthony Giddens](#) in “*The Constitution of Society*”
- Giddens, A. (1984). *The constitution of society: Outline of the theory of structuration*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

- *Capitalism and Modern Social Theory* (1971) and *The Class Structure of Advanced Societies* (1981) are two useful books that summarize classical theory very well.
- *The Constitution of Society* (1984) is a more theoretical book that presents and develops his structuration theory.

- the term *structure* refers to the “systemic form” or structuring properties allowing the 'binding' of time-space in social systems“/ rules and resources.
- "Duality of structure: Structure is both medium (agent, social practice) and outcome of reproduction of practices.

Sewell, Jr., W. H. (1992). A theory of structure: duality, agency, and transformation. *The American Journal of Sociology*, 98(1):1-29.

- For Giddens, structure refers to practices which are structured along certain lines. These are:
- Procedural rules – how the practice is performed. Ethnomethodology analyzes such rules.
- Moral rules – appropriate ways/forms of enactment of social action: Laws, what is permissible and what is not.
- Material resources – allocation of resources among activities and members of society. Means of production, commodities, income, consumer and capital goods.
- Resources of authority. Formal organizations, how time and space are organized, production and reproduction, social mobility, legitimacy and authority

- social structures contain agents and/or are the product of past actions of agents.
- Giddens holds this duality, alongside "structure" and "system," as the core of structuration theory.
- Situates such structures in human practice

Giddens, A. (1984). *The constitution of society: Outline of the theory of structuration*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

- agents and structures mutually enact social systems, and social systems in turn become part of that duality.
- In examining social systems, structuration theory examines “structure”, “interaction” and “modality”
- The "modality" of a structural system is the means by which structures are translated into actions.

- Interaction is the agent's activity within the social system (time and space)
- "Frames" are "clusters of rules which help to constitute and regulate activities, defining them as activities of a certain sort and as subject to a given range of sanctions.
- Framing is the practice by which agents make sense of what they are doing. "What is going on here?"
- Makes everyday actions have some degree of predictability

- Structuration theory is concerned with “order” in human social relationships
- Routinization for reproduction of social systems
- Routinized social practices do not stem from coincidence, "but the skilled accomplishments of knowledgeable agents

- Structures and agents are both internal and external to each other, and continually changing each other
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HCl1561gu8>

Nick Herriman, author of Entangled State, www.yale.edu/seas/EntangledState.htm. In the "25 Concepts in Anthropology" series, presenting what is thought to be the 25 most important concepts in socio-cultural anthropology. Each concept provides a unique insight into what it is to be human. This episode concerns the concepts of "structure" and "agency"

Criticism

- Strong structuration
- Micro-level activities vs Macro-level explanations
- Multiplicity of changes in the patterns of the network's actors agency and interactions
- Contradictions & conflicts within a network

(Walsham, 2002)